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KINGSLEY

TWO YEARS AGO

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TWO YEARS AGO.

INTRODUCTORY.

It may seem a somewhat Irish method of beginning the story of "Two Years Ago" by a scene which happened but a month since. And yet, will not the story be on that very account a better type of many a man's own experiences? How few of us had learnt the meaning of "Two years ago," until this late quiet autumn time; and till Christmas, too, with its gaps in the old ring of friendly faces, never to be filled up again on earth, began to teach us somewhat of its lesson.

Two years ago, while pestilence was hovering over us and ours; while the battle-roar was ringing in our ears; who had time to think, to ask what all that meant; to seek for the deep lesson which we knew must lie beneath? Two years ago was the time for work; for men to do with all their might whatsoever their hands found to do. But now, the storm has lulled once more; the air has cleared awhile, and we can talk calmly over all the wonders of that sudden, strange, and sad "Two years ago."

So felt, at least, two friends who went down, just one week before Christmas-day, to Whitbury, in Berkshire. Two years ago had come to one of them, as to thousands more, the crisis of his life; and he was talking of it with his companion; and was on his way, too, to learn more of that story, which this book contains, and in which he had borne his part.

They were both of them men who would at first sight interest a stranger. The shorter of the two he might have seen before—at picture sales, Royal Academy meetings, dinner parties, evening parties, anywhere and everywhere in town; for Claude Mellot is a general favourite, and a general guest.

He is a tiny, delicate-featured man, with a look of half-lazy enthusiasm about his beautiful face, which reminds you much of Shelley's portrait; only he has what Shelley had not, clustering brown curls, and a rich brown beard, soft as silk. You set him down at once as a man of delicate susceptibility, sweetness, thoughtfulness; probably (as he actually is) an artist.

His companion is a man of statelier stamp, tall, dark, and handsome, with a very large forehead : if the face has a fault, it is that the mouth is too small ; that, and the expression of face too, and the tone of voice, seem to indicate over-refinement, possibly a too aristocratic exclusiveness. He is dressed like a very fine gentleman indeed, and looks and talks like one. Aristocrat, however, in the common sense of the word, he is not, for he is a native of the Model Republic, and sleeping-partner in a great New York merchant firm.

He is chatting away to Claude Mellot, the artist, about Frémont's election ; and on that point seems to be earnest enough, though patient and moderate.

"My dear Claude, our loss is gain. The delay of the next four years was really necessary, that we might consolidate our party. And I leave you to judge, if it has grown to its present size in but a few months, what dimensions it will have attained before the next election. We require the delay, too, to discover who are our really best men ; not merely as orators, but as workers ; and you English ought to know, better than any nation, that the latter class of men are those whom the world most needs—that though Aaron may be an altogether inspired preacher, yet it is only slow-tongued practical Moses, whose spokesman he is, who can deliver Israel from their taskmasters. Besides, my dear fellow, we really want the next four years—'tell it not in Gath' —to look about us, and see what is to be done. Your wisest Englishmen justly complain of us, that our 'platform' is as yet a merely negative one ; that we define what the South shall not do, but not what the North shall. Ere four years be over, we will have a 'positive platform,' at which you shall have no cause to grumble."

"I still think with Marie, that your 'positive platform' is already made for you, plain as the sun in heaven, as the lightnings of Sinai. Free those slaves at once and utterly !"

"Impatient idealist ! By what means ? By law, or by force ? Leave us to draw a *cordon sanitaire* round the tainted states, and leave the system to die a natural death, as it rapidly will if it be prevented from enlarging its field. Don't fancy that a dream of mine. None know it better than the Southerners themselves. What makes them ready just now to risk honour, justice, even the common law of nations and humanity, in the struggle for new slave territory ? What but the consciousness that without virgin soil, which will yield rapid and enormous profit to slave labour, they and their institution must be ruined !"

"The more reason for accelerating so desirable a consummation, by freeing the slaves at once."

"Humph !" said Stangrave, with a smile. "Who so cruel at

times as your too-benevolent philanthropist? Did you ever count the meaning of those words? Disruption of the Union, an invasion of the South by the North; and an internecine war, aggravated by the horrors of a general rising of the slaves, and such scenes as Hayti beheld sixty years ago. If you have ever read them, you will pause ere you determine to repeat them on a vaster scale."

"It is dreadful, Heaven knows, even in thought! But, Stangrave, can any moderation on your part ward it off? Where there is crime, there is vengeance; and without shedding of blood is no remission of sin."

"God knows! It may be true: but God forbid that I should ever do aught to hasten what may come. Oh Claude, do you fancy that I, of all men, do not feel at moments the thirst for brute vengeance?"

Claude was silent.

"Judge for yourself, you who know all—what man among us Northerners can feel, as I do, what those hapless men may have deserved?—I who have day and night before me the brand of their cruelty, filling my heart with fire? I need all my strength, all my reason, at times to say to myself, as I say to others—'Are not these slaveholders men of like passions with yourself? What have they done which you would not have done in their place?' I have never read that Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin. I will not even read this Dred, admirable as I believe it to be."

"Why should you?" said Claude. "Have you not a key to Uncle Tom's Cabin, more pathetic than any word of man's or woman's?"

"But I do not mean that! I will not read them, because I have the key to them in my own heart, Claude: because conscience has taught me to feel for the Southerner as a brother, who is but what I might have been; and to sigh over his misdirected courage and energy, not with hatred, not with contempt: but with pity, all the more intense the more he scorns that pity; to long, not merely for the slaves' sake, but for the masters' sake, to see them—the once chivalrous gentlemen of the South—delivered from the meshes of a net which they did not spread for themselves, but which was round their feet, and round their fathers', from the day that they were born. You ask me to destroy these men. I long to save them from their certain doom!"

"You are right, and a better Christian than I am, I believe. Certainly they do need pity, if any sinners do; for slavery seems to be—to judge from Mr. Brooks's triumph—a great moral curse, and a heavier degradation to the slaveholder himself, than it can ever be to the slave.

"Then I would free them from that curse, that degradation.

If the negro asks, 'Am I not a man and a brother?' have they no right to ask it also? Shall I, pretending to love my country, venture on any rash step which may shut out the whole Southern white population from their share in my country's future glory? No; have but patience with us, you comfortable liberals of the Old World, who find freedom ready made to your hands, and we will pay you all. Remember, we are but children yet; our sins are the sins of youth,—greediness, intemperance, petulance, self-conceit. When we are purged from our youthful sins, England will not be ashamed of her child."

"Ashamed of you? I often wish I could make Americans understand the feeling of England to you—the honest pride, as of a mother who has brought into the world the biggest baby that ever this earth beheld, and is rather proud of its stamping about and beating her in its pretty pets. Only the old lady does get a little cross when she hears you talk of the wrongs which you have endured from her, and teaching your children to hate us as their ancient oppressors, on the ground of a foolish war, of which every Englishman is utterly ashamed, and in the result of which he glories really as much as you do."

"Don't talk of 'you,' Claude! You know well what I think on that point. Never did one nation make the *amende honorable* to another more fully and nobly than you have to us; and those who try to keep up the quarrel are—I won't say what. But the truth is, Claude, we have had no real sorrows; and therefore we can afford to play with imaginary ones. God grant that we may not have our real ones—that we may not have to drink of the cup of which our great mother drank two years ago!"

"It was a wholesome bitter for us; and it may be so for you likewise: but we will have no sad forebodings on the eve of the blessed Christmas-tide. He lives, He loves, He reigns; and all is well, for we are His, and He is ours."

"Ah," said Stangrave, "when Emerson sneered at you English for believing your Old Testament, he little thought that that was the lesson which it had taught you; and that that same lesson was the root of all your greatness. That that belief in God's being, in some mysterious way, the living King of England and of Christendom, has been the very idea which has kept you in peace and safety, now for many a hundred years, moving slowly on from good to better, not without many backslidings and many shortcomings, but still finding out, quickly enough, when you were on the wrong road, and not ashamed to retrace your steps, and to *reform*, as brave strong men should dare to do; a people who have been for many an age in the vanguard of all the nations, and the champions of sure and solid progress throughout the world; because what is new among you is not patched artificially

on to the old, but grows organically out of it, with a growth like that of your own English oak, whose every new-year's leaf-crop is fed by roots which burrow deep in many a buried generation, and the rich soil of full a thousand years."

"Stay!" said the little artist. "We are quite conceited enough already, without your eloquent adulation, Sir! But there is a truth in your words. There is a better spirit roused among us, and that not merely of two years ago. I knew this part of the country well in 1846–7–8, and since then, I can bear witness, a spirit of self-reform has been awakened round here, in many a heart which I thought once utterly frivolous. I find, in every circle of every class, men and women asking to be taught their duty, that they may go and do it; I find everywhere schools, libraries, and mechanics' institutes springing up: and rich and poor meeting together more and more in the faith that God has made them all. As for the outward and material improvements —you know as well as I, that since free trade and emigration, the labourers confess themselves better off than they have been for fifty years; and though you will not see in the chalk counties that rapid and enormous agricultural improvement which you will in Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, or the Lothians, yet you shall see enough to-day to settle for you the question whether we old-country folk are in a state of decadence and decay. *Par exemple*——"

And Claude pointed to the clean large fields, with their neat close-clipt hedge-rows, among which here and there stood cottages, more than three-fourths of them new.

"Those well-drained fallow fields, ten years ago, were poor clay pastures, fetlock deep in mire six months in the year, and accursed in the eyes of my poor dear old friend, Squire Lavington; because they were so full of old moles'-nests, that they threw all horses down. I am no farmer: but they seem surely to be somewhat altered since then."

As he spoke, they turned off the main line of the rolling clays toward the foot of the chalk hills, and began to brush through short cuttings of blue gault and "green sand," so called by geologists, because its usual colours are bright brown, snow-white, and crimson.

Soon they get glimpses of broad silver Whit, as she slides, with divided streams, through bright water-meadows, and stately groves of poplar, and abele, and pine; while, far aloft upon the left, the downs rise steep, crowned with black fir spinnies, and dotted with dark box and juniper.

Soon they pass old Whitford Priory, with its numberless gables nestling amid mighty elms, and the Nunpool flashing and roaring, as of old, and the broad shallow below sparkling and laughing in the low, but bright December sun.

"So slides on the noble river, for ever changing, and yet for ever the same—always fulfilling its errand, which yet is never fulfilled," said Stangrave,—he was given to half-mystic utterances, and hankerings after Pagan mythology, learnt in the days when he worshipped Emerson, and tried (but unsuccessfully) to worship Margaret Fuller Ossoli,—"Those old Greeks had a deep insight into nature, when they gave to each river not merely a name, but a semi-human personality, a river-god of its own. It may be but a collection of ever-changing atoms of water;—what is your body but a similar collection of atoms, decaying and renewing every moment? Yet you are a person; and is not the river, too, a person—a live thing? It has an individual countenance which you love, which you would recognise again, meet it where you will; it marks the whole landscape; it determines probably the geography and the society of a whole district. It draws you, too, to itself by an indefinable mesmeric attraction. If you stop in a strange place, the first instinct of your idle half-hour is, to lounge by the river. It is a person to you; you call it—Scotchmen do, at least—she, and not it. How do you know that you are not philosophically correct, and that the river has a spirit as well as you?"

"Humph!" said Claude, who talks mysticism himself by the hour, but snubs it in every one else. "It has trout, at least; and they stand, I suppose, for its soul, as the raisins did for those of Jean Paul's gingerbread bride and bridegroom and peradventure baby."

"Oh you materialist English! sporting-mad all of you, from the duke who shooteth stags to the clod who poacheth rabbits!"

"And who therefore can fight Russians at Inkermann, duke and clod alike, and side by side; never better (says the chronicler of old) than in their first battle. I can neither fight nor fish, and on the whole agree with you: but I think it proper to be as English as I can in the presence of an American."

A whistle—a creak—a jar; and they stop at the little Whitford station, where a cicerone for the vale, far better than Claude was, made his appearance, in the person of Mark Armsworth, banker, railway director, and *de facto* king of Whitbury town, long since elected by universal suffrage (his own vote included) as permanent *locum tenens* of her gracious Majesty.

He hails Claude cheerfully from the platform, as he waddles about, with a face as of the rising sun, radiant with good fun, good humour, good deeds, good news, and good living. His coat was scarlet once; but purple now. His leathers and boots were doubtless clean this morning; but are now afflicted with elephantiasis, being three inches deep in solid mud, which his old groom is scraping off as fast as he can. His cap is duntled in; his back

bears fresh stains of peat; a gentle rain distils from the few angles of his person, and bedews the platform; for Mark Armsworth has "been in Whit" to-day.

All porters and guards touch their hats to him; the station-master rushes up and down frantically, shouting, "Where are those horse-boxes? Now then, look alive!" for Mark is chairman of the line, and everybody's friend beside; and as he stands there being scraped, he finds time to inquire after every one of the officials by turns, and after their wives, children, and sweethearts beside.

"What a fine specimen of your English squire!" says Stangrave.

"He is no squire; he is the Whitbury banker, of whom I told you."

"Armsworth!" said Stangrave, looking at the old man with interest.

"Mark Armsworth himself. He is acting as squire, though, now; for he has hunted the Whitford Priors ever since poor old Lavington's death."

"Now then—those horse-boxes!" . . .

"Very sorry, Sir; I telegraphed up, but we could get but one down."

"Put the horses into that, then; and there's an empty carriage! Jack, put the hounds into it, and they shall all go second class, as sure as I'm chairman!"

The grinning porters hand the strange passengers in, while Mark counts the couples with his whip-point,—

"Ravager—Roysterer; Melody—Gay-lass; all right. Why, where's that old thief of a Goodman?"

"Went over a gate as soon as he saw the couples; and wouldn't come in at any price, Sir," says the huntsman. "Gone home by himself, I expect."

"Goodman, Goodman, boy!" And forthwith out of the station-room slips the noble old hound, grey-nosed, grey-eye-browed, who has hidden, for purposes of his own, till he sees all the rest safe locked in.

Up he goes to Mark, and begins wriggling against his knees, and looking up as only dogs can. "Oh, want to go first-class with me, eh? Jump in, then!" And in jumps the hound, and Mark struggles after him.

"Hillo, Sir! Come out! Here are your betters here before you," as he sees Stangrave, and a fat old lady in the opposite corner

"Oh, no; let the dog stay!" says Stangrave.

"I shall wet you, Sir, I'm afraid."

"Oh, no."

And Mark settles himself, puffing, with the hound's head on his knees, and begins talking fast and loud.

"Well, Mr. Mellot, you're a stranger here. Haven't seen you since poor Miss Honour died. Ah, sweet angel she was! Thought my Mary would never get over it. She's just such another, though I say it, barring the beauty. Goodman, boy! You recollect old Goodman, son of Galloper, that the old squire gave our old squire?"

Claude, of course, knows—as all do who know those parts—who The Old Squire is; long may he live, patriarch of the chase! The genealogy he does not.

"Ah, well—Miss Honour took to the pup, and used to walk him out; and a prince of a hound he is; so now he's old we let him have his own way, for her sake; and nobody 'll ever bully you, will they, Goodman, my boy?"

"I want to introduce you to a friend of mine."

"Proud to know any friend of yours, Sir."

"Mr. Stangrave—Mr. Armsworth. Mr. Stangrave is an American gentleman, who is anxious to see Whitbury and the neighbourhood."

"Well, I shall be happy to show it him, then—can't have a better guide, though I say it—know everything by this time, and everybody, man, woman, and child, as I hope Mr. Stangrave 'll find when he gets to know old Mark."

"You must not speak of getting to know you, my dear Sir; I know you intimately already, I assure you; and more, am under very deep obligations to you, which, I regret to say, I can only repay by thanks."

"Obligation to me, my dear Sir?"

"Indeed I am: I will tell you all when we are alone." And Stangrave glanced at the fat old woman, who seemed to be listening intently.

"Oh, never mind her," says Armsworth; "deaf as a post: very good woman, but so deaf—ought to speak to her, though"—and, reaching across, to the infinite amusement of his companions, he roared in the fat woman's face, with a voice as of a speaking-trumpet—"Glad to see you, Mrs. Grove! Got those dividends ready for you next time you come into town."

"Yah!" screamed the hapless woman, who (as the rest saw) heard perfectly well. "What do you mean, frightening a lady in that way? Deaf, indeed!"

"Why," roared Mark again, "ain't you Mrs. Grove, of Drytown Dirtywater?"

"No, nor no acquaintance! What business is it of your'n, Sir, to go hollering in ladies' faces at your age?"

"Well:—but I'll swear if you ain't her, you're somebody else. I know you as well as the town clock."

"Me? If you must know, Sir, I'm Mrs. Pettigrew's mother,

the Linendraper's establishment, Sir; a-going down for Christmas, Sir!"

"Humph!" says Mark; "you see—was sure I knew her—know everybody here. As I said, if she wasn't Mrs. Grove, she was somebody else. Ever in these parts before?"

"Never: but I have heard a good deal of them; and very much charmed with them I am. I have seldom seen a more distinctive specimen of English scenery."

"And how you are improving round here!" said Claude, who knew Mark's weak points, and wanted to draw him out. "Your homesteads seem all new; three fields have been thrown into one, I fancy, over half the farms."

Mark broke out at once on his favourite topic,—"I believe you! I'm making the mare go here in Whitford, without the money too, sometimes. I'm steward now, bailiff—ha! ha! these four years past—to Mrs. Lavington's Irish husband; I wanted him to have a regular agent, a canny Scot, or Yorkshireman. Faith, the poor man couldn't afford it, and so fell back on old Mark. Paddy loves a job, you know. So I've the votes and the fishing, and send him his rents, and manage all the rest pretty much my own way."

When the name of Lavington was mentioned, Mark observed Stangrave start; and an expression passed over his face difficult to be defined—it seemed to Mark mingled pride and shame. He turned to Claude, and said, in a low voice, but loud enough for Mark to hear,—

"Lavington? Is this their country also? As I am going to visit the graves of my ancestors, I suppose I ought to visit those of hers."

Mark caught the words which he was not intended to.

"Eh? Sir, do you belong to these parts?"

"My family, I believe, lived in the neighbourhood of Whitbury, at a place called Stangrave-end."

"To be sure! Old farm-house now; fine old oak carving in it, though; fine old family it must have been; church full of their monuments. Hum,—ha! Well! that's pleasant, now! I've often heard there were good old families away there in New England; never thought that there were Whitbury people among them. Hum—well! the world's not so big as people think, after all. And you spoke of the Lavingtons? They are great folks here—or were"—He was going to rattle on: but he saw a pained expression on both the travellers' faces, and Stangrave stopped him, somewhat drily—

"I know nothing of them, I assure you, or they of me. Your country here is certainly charming, and shows little of those signs of decay which some people in America impute to it."

"Decay!" Mark went off at score. "Decay be hanged! There's life in the old dog yet, Sir! and dead pigs are looking up since free trade and emigration. Cheap bread and high wages now; and instead of lands going out of cultivation, as they threatened—bosh! there's a greater breadth down in wheat in the vale now than there ever was; and look at the roots. Farmers must farm now, or sink; and, by George! they are farming, like sensible fellows; and a fig for that old turnip ghost of Protection! There was a fellow came down from the Carlton—you know what that is?" Stangrave bowed, and smiled assent. "From the Carlton, Sir, two years since, and tried it on, till he fell in with old Mark. I told him a thing or two; among the rest, told him to his face that he was a liar; for he wanted to make farmers believe they were ruined, when he knew they were not; and that he'd get 'em back Protection, when he knew that he couldn't—and, what's more, he didn't mean to. So he cut up rough, and wanted to call me out."

"Did you go?" asked Stangrave, who was fast becoming amused with his man.

"I told him that that wasn't my line, unless he'd try Eley's greens at forty yards; and then I was his man: but if he laid a finger on me, I'd give him as sound a horsewhipping, old as I am, as ever man had in his life. And so I would." And Mark looked complacently at his own broad shoulders. "And since then, my lord and I have had it all our own way; and Minchampstead & Co. is the only firm in the vale."

"What's become of a Lord Vieuxbois, who used to live somewhere hereabouts? I used to meet him at Rome."

"Rome?" said Mark solemnly. "Yes; he was too fond of Rome, awhile back: can't see what people want running into foreign parts to look at those poor idolators, and their Punch and Judy plays. Pray for 'em, and keep clear of them, is the best rule:—but he has married my lord's youngest daughter; and three pretty children he has,—ducks of children. Always comes to see me in my shop, when he drives into town. Oh!—he's doing pretty well.—One of these new between-the-stools, Peelites they call them—hope they'll be as good as the name. However, he's a free-trader, because he can't help it. So we have his votes; and as to his Conservatism, let him conserve hips and haws if he chooses, like a 'pothecary. After all, why pull down anything, before it's tumbling on your head? By the bye, Sir, as you're a man of money, there's that Stangrave-end farm in the market now. Pretty little investment,—I'd see that you got it cheap; and my lord wouldn't bid against you, of course, as you're a liberal—all Americans are, I suppose

And so you'd oblige us, as well as yourself, for it would give us another vote for the county."

"Upon my word, you tempt me; but I do not think that this is just the moment for an American to desert his own country, and settle in England. I should not be here now, had I not this autumn done all I could for America in America, and so crossed the sea to serve her, if possible, in England."

"Well, perhaps not; especially if you're a Frémonter."

"I am, I assure you."

"Thought as much, by your looks. Don't see what else an honest man can be just now."

Stangrave laughed. "I hope every one thinks so in England."

"Trust us for that, Sir! We know a man when we see him here; I hope they'll do the same across the water."

There was silence for a minute or two; and then Mark began again.

"Look!—there's the farm; that's my lord's. I should like to show you the short-horns there, Sir!—all my Lord Ducie's and Sir Edward Knightley's stock; bought a bull-calf of him the other day myself for a cool hundred, old fool that I am. Never mind, spreads the breed. And here are mills—four pair of new stones. Old Whit don't know herself again. But I dare say they look small enough to you, Sir, after your American water-power."

"What of that? It is just as honourable in you to make the most of a small river, as in us to make the most of a large one."

"You speak like a book, Sir. By the bye, if you think of taking home a calf or two, to improve your New England breed—there are a good many gone across the sea in the last few years—I think we could find you three or four beauties, not so very dear, considering the blood."

"Thanks; but I really am no farmer."

"Well—no offence, I hope: but I am like your Yankees in one thing, you see;—always have an eye to a bit of business. If I didn't, I shouldn't be here now."

"How very tasteful!—our own American shrubs! what a pity that they are not in flower! What is this," asked Stangrave,—"one of your noblemen's parks?"

And they began to run through the cutting in Minchampstead Park, where the owner has concealed the banks of the rail for nearly half a mile, in a thicket of azaleas, rhododendrons, and clambering roses.

"Ah!—isn't it pretty? His lordship let us have the land for a song; only bargained that we should keep low, not to spoil his view; and so we did; and he's planted our cutting for us

I call that a present to the county, and a very pretty one too! Ah, give me these new brooms that sweep clean?"

"Your old brooms, like Lord Vieuxbois, were new brooms once, and swept well enough five hundred years ago," said Stangrave, who had that filial reverence for English antiquity which sits so gracefully upon many highly educated and far-sighted Americans.

"Worn to the stumps, now, too many of them, Sir; and want new-hething, as our broom-squires would say; and I doubt whether most of them are worth the cost of a fresh bind. Not that I can say that of the young lord. He's foremost in all that's good, if he had but money; and when he hasn't, he gives brains. Gave a lecture, in our institute at Whitford, last winter, on the four great Poets. Shot over my head a little, and other people's too: but my Mary—my daughter, Sir, thought it beautiful; and there's nothing that she don't know."

"It is very hopeful, to see your aristocracy joining in the general movement, and bringing their taste and knowledge to bear on the lower classes."

"Yes, Sir! We're going all right now, in the old country. Only have to steer straight, and not put on too much steam. But give me the new-comers, after all. They may be close men of business;—how else could one live? But when it comes to giving, I'll back them against the old ones for generosity, or taste either. They've their proper pride, when they get hold of the land; and they like to show it, and quite right they. You must see my little place too. It's not in such bad order, though I say it, and am but a country banker: but I'll back my flowers against half the squires round—my Mary's, that is—and my fruit, too.—See, there! There's my lord's new schools, and his model cottages, with more comforts in them, saving the size, than my father's house had; and there's his barrack, as he calls it, for the unmarried men—reading-room, and dining-room, in common; and a library of books, and a sleeping-room for each."

"It seems strange to complain of prosperity," said Stangrave; "but I sometimes regret that in America there is so little room for the very highest virtues; all are so well off, that one never needs to give; and what a man does here for others, they do for themselves."

"So much the better for them. There are other ways of being generous besides putting your hand in your pocket, Sir! By Jove! there'll be room enough (if you'll excuse me) for an American to do fine things, as long as those poor negro slaves——"

"I know it; I know it," said Stangrave, in the tone of a man who had already made up his mind on a painful subject, and wished to hear no more of it. "You will excuse me; but I am

come here to learn what I can of England. Of my own country I know enough, I trust, to do my duty in it when I return."

Mark was silent, seeing that he had touched a tender place; and pointed out one object of interest after another, as they ran through the flat park, past the great house with its Doric façade, which the eighteenth century had raised above the quiet cell of the Minchampstead recluses.

"It is very ugly," said Stangrave; and truly.

"Comfortable enough, though; and, as somebody said, people live inside their houses, and not outside 'em. You should see the pictures there, though, while you're in the country. I can show you one or two, too, I hope. Never grudge money for good pictures. The pleasantest furniture in the world, as long as you keep them; and if you're tired of them, always fetch double their price."

After Minchampstead, the rail leaves the sands and clays, and turns up between the chalk hills, along the barge river, which it has rendered useless, save as a supernumerary trout-stream; and then along Whit, now flowing clearer and clearer, as we approach its springs amid the lofty downs. On through more water-meadows, and rows of pollard willow, and peat-pits crested with tall golden reeds, and still dykes,—each in summer a floating flower-bed; while Stangrave looks out of the window, his face lighting up with curiosity.

"How perfectly English! At least, how perfectly un-American! It is just Tennyson's beautiful dream—

> 'On either side the river lie
> Long fields of barley and of rye,
> Which clothe the wold and meet the sky,
> And through the field the stream runs by,
> To many-towered Camelot.'

"Why, what is this?" as they stop again at a station, where the board bears, in large letters, "Shalott."

"Shalott? Where are the

> 'Four grey walls, and four grey towers,'

which overlook a space of flowers?"

There, upon the little island, are the castle-ruins, now converted into a useful bone-mill. "And the lady?—is that she?"

It was only the miller's daughter, fresh from a boarding-school, gardening in a broad straw-hat.

"At least," said Claude, "she is tending far prettier flowers than ever the lady saw; while the lady herself, instead of weaving and dreaming, is reading Miss Young's novels, and becoming all the wiser thereby, and teaching poor children in Hemmelford National School."

"And where is her fairy knight," asked Stangrave, "whom one half hopes to see riding down from that grand old house which sulks there above among the beech-woods, as if frowning on all the change and civilisation below?"

"You do old Sidrickstone injustice. Vieuxbois descends from thence, now-a-days, to lecture at mechanics' institutes, instead of the fairy knight, toiling along in the blazing summer weather, sweating in burning metal, like poor Perillus in his own bull."

"Then the fairy knight is extinct in England?" asked Stangrave, smiling.

"No man less; only he (not Vieuxbois, but his younger brother) has found a wide-awake cooler than an iron kettle, and travels by rail when he is at home; and when he was in the Crimea, rode a shaggy pony, and smoked cavendish all through the battle of Inkermann."

"He showed himself the old Sir Lancelot there," said Stangrave.

"He did. Wherefore the lady married him when the Guards came home; and he will breed prize pigs; and sit at the board of guardians; and take in The Times; clothed, and in his right mind; for the old Berserk spirit is gone out of him; and he is become respectable, in a respectable age, and is nevertheless just as brave a fellow as ever."

"And so all things are changed, except the river; where still—

> 'Willows whiten, aspens quiver.
> Little breezes dash and shiver
> On the stream that runneth ever.'"

"And," said Claude, smiling, "the descendants of mediæval trout snap at the descendants of mediæval flies, spinning about upon just the same sized and coloured wings on which their forefathers spun a thousand years ago; having become, in all that while, neither bigger nor wiser."

"But is it not a grand thought," asked Stangrave,—"the silence and permanence of nature amid the perpetual flux and noise of human life?—a grand thought that one generation goeth, and another cometh, and the earth abideth for ever?"

"At least it is so much the worse for the poor old earth, if her doom is to stand still, while man improves and progresses from age to age."

"May I ask one question, Sir?" said Stangrave, who saw that their conversation was puzzling their jolly companion. "Have you heard any news yet of Mr. Thurnall?"

Mark looked him full in the face.

"Do you know him?"

"I did, in past years, most intimately."

"Then you knew the finest fellow, Sir, that ever walked mortal earth."

"I have discovered that, Sir, as well as you. I am under obligations to that man which my heart's blood will not repay. I shall make no secret of telling you what they are at a fit time."

Mark held out his broad red hand, and grasped Stangrave's till the joints cracked: his face grew as red as a turkey-cock's; his eyes filled with tears.

"His father must hear that! Hang it; his father must hear that! And Grace too!"

"Grace!" said Claude: "and is she with you?"

"With the old man, the angel! tending him night and day."

"And as beautiful as ever?"

"Sir!" said Mark solemnly, "when any one's soul is as beautiful as hers is, one never thinks about her face."

"Who is Grace?" asked Stangrave.

"A saint and a heroine!" said Claude. "You shall know all; for you ought to know. But you have no news of Tom; and I have none either. I am losing all hope now."

"I'm not, Sir!" said Mark fiercely. "Sir, that boy's not dead; he can't be. He has more lives than a cat, and if you know anything of him, you ought to know that."

"I have good reason to know it, none more: but—"

"But, Sir! But what? Harm come to him, Sir? The Lord wouldn't harm him, for his father's sake; and as for the devil! —I tell you, Sir, if he tried to fly away with him, he'd have to drop him before he'd gone a mile!" And Mark began blowing his nose violently, and getting so red that he seemed on the point of going into a fit.

"Tell you what it is, gentlemen," said he at last, "you come and stay with me, and see his father. It will comfort the old man—and—and comfort me too; for I get down-hearted about him at times."

"Strange attraction there was about that man," says Stangrave, *sotto voce*, to Claude.

"He was like a son to him—"

"Now, gentlemen. Mr. Mellot, you don't hunt?"

"No, thank you," said Claude.

"Mr. Stangrave does, I'll warrant."

"I have at various times, both in England and in Virginia."

"Ah! Do they keep up the real sport there, eh? Well, that's the best thing I've heard of them. Sir!—My horses are yours! —A friend of that boy, Sir, is welcome to lame the whole lot, and I won't grumble. Three days a week, Sir. Breakfast at eight, dinner at 5.30—none of your late London hours for me,

Sir; and after it the best bottle of port, though I say it, short of my friend S——'s, at Reading."

"You must accept," whispered Claude, "or he will be angry."

So Stangrave accepted; and all the more readily because he wanted to hear from the good banker many things about the lost Tom Thurnall.

* * * * *

"Here we are," cries Mark. "Now, you must excuse me: see to yourselves. I see to the puppies. Dinner at 5.30, mind! Come along, Goodman, boy!"

"Is this Whitbury," asks Stangrave.

It was Whitbury, indeed. Pleasant old town, which slopes down the hill-side to the old church,—just "restored," though, by Lords Minchampstead and Vieuxbois, not without Mark Armsworth's help, to its ancient beauty of grey flint and white clunch chequer-work, and quaint wooden spire. Pleasant churchyard round it, where the dead lie looking up to the bright southern sun, among huge black yews, upon their knoll of white chalk above the ancient stream. Pleasant white wooden bridge, with its row of urchins dropping flints upon the noses of elephantine trout, or fishing over the rail with crooked pins, while hapless gudgeon come dangling upward between stream and sky, with a look of sheepish surprise and shame, as of a schoolboy caught stealing apples, in their foolish visages. Pleasant new national schools at the bridge end, whither the urchins scamper at the sound of the two o'clock bell. Though it be an ugly pile enough of bright red brick, it is doing its work, as Whitbury folk know well by now. Pleasant, too, though still more ugly, those long red arms of new houses which Whitbury is stretching out along its fine turnpikes,—especially up to the railway station beyond the bridge, and to the smart new hotel, which hopes (but hopes in vain) to outrival the ancient "Angler's Rest." Away thither, and not to the Railway Hotel, they trundle in a fly—leaving Mark Armsworth all but angry because they will not sleep, as well as breakfast, lunch, and dine with him daily,—and settle in the good old inn, with its three white gables overhanging the pavement, and its long lattice window buried deep beneath them, like—so Stangrave says—to a shrewd kindly eye under a bland white forehead.

No, good old inn; not such shall be thy fate, as long as trout are trout, and men have wit to catch them. For art thou not a sacred house? Art thou not consecrate to the Whitbury brotherhood of anglers? Is not the wainscot of that long low parlour inscribed with many a famous name? Are not its walls hung with many a famous countenance? Has not its oak-ribbed ceiling rung, for now a hundred years, to the laughter of painters,

sculptors, grave divines (unbending at least there), great lawyers, statesmen, wits, even of Foote and Quin themselves; while the sleek landlord wiped the cobwebs off another magnum of that grand old port, and took in all the wisdom with a quiet twinkle of his sleepy eye? He rests now, good old man, among the yews beside his forefathers; and on his tomb his lengthy epitaph, writ by himself; for Barker was a poet in his way.

Some people hold the same epitaph to be irreverent, because in a list of Barker's many blessings occurs the profane word "trout:" but those trout, and the custom which they brought him, had made the old man's life comfortable, and enabled him to leave a competence for his children; and why should not a man honestly thank Heaven for that which he knows has done him good, even though it be but fish?

He is gone: but the Whit is not, nor the Whitbury club; nor will, while old Mark Armsworth is king in Whitbury, and sits every evening in the May-fly season at the table head, retailing good stories of the great anglers of his youth,—names which you, reader, have heard many a time,—and who could do many things besides handling a blow-line. But though the club is not what it was fifty years ago,—before Norway and Scotland became easy of access,—yet it is still an important institution of the town, to the members whereof all good subjects touch their hats; for does not the club bring into the town good money, and take out again only fish, which cost nothing in the breeding? Did not the club present the Town-hall with a portrait of the renowned fishing Sculptor? and did it not (only stipulating that the school should be built beyond the bridge to avoid noise) give fifty pounds to the said school but five years ago, in addition to Mark's own hundred?

But enough of this:—only may the Whitbury club, in recompense for my thus handing them down to immortality, give me another day next year, as they gave me this: and may the May-fly be strong on, and a south-west gale blowing!

In the course of the next week, in many a conversation, the three men compared notes as to the events of two years ago; and each supplied the other with new facts, which shall be duly set forth in this tale, saving and excepting, of course, the real reason why everybody did everything. For—as everybody knows who has watched life—the true springs of all human action are generally those which fools will not see, which wise men will not mention; so that, in order to present a readable tragedy of Hamlet, you must always "omit the part of Hamlet,"—and probably the ghost and the queen into the bargain.

CHAPTER I.

POETRY AND PROSE.

Now, to tell my story—if not as it ought to be told, at least as I can tell it,—I must go back sixteen years,—to the days when Whitbury boasted of forty coaches per diem, instead of one railway,—and set forth how, in its southern suburb, there stood two pleasant houses side by side, with their gardens sloping down to the Whit, and parted from each other only by the high brick fruit-wall, through which there used to be a door of communication; for the two occupiers were fast friends. In one of these two houses, sixteen years ago, lived our friend Mark Armsworth, banker, solicitor, land-agent, churchwarden, guardian of the poor, justice of the peace,—in a word, viceroy of Whitbury town, and far more potent therein than her gracious majesty Queen Victoria. In the other, lived Edward Thurnall, esquire, doctor of medicine, and consulting physician of all the country round. These two men were as brothers; and had been as brothers for now twenty years, though no two men could be more different, save in the two common virtues which bound them to each other; and that was, that they both were honest and kind-hearted men. What Mark's character was, and is, I have already shown, and enough of it, I hope, to make my readers like the good old banker: as for Doctor Thurnall, a purer or gentler soul never entered a sick-room, with patient wisdom in his brain, and patient tenderness in his heart. Beloved and trusted by rich and poor, he had made to himself a practice large enough to enable him to settle two sons well in his own profession; the third and youngest was still in Whitbury. He was something of a geologist, too, and a botanist, and an antiquarian; and Mark Armsworth, who knew, and knows still, nothing of science, looked up to the Doctor as an inspired sage, quoted him, defended his opinion, right or wrong, and thrust him forward at public meetings, and in all places and seasons, much to the modest Doctor's discomfiture.

The good Doctor was sitting in his study on the morning on which my tale begins; having just finished his breakfast, and settled to his microscope in the bay-window opening on the lawn.

A beautiful October morning it was; one of those in which Dame Nature, healthily tired with the revelry of summer, is composing herself, with a quiet satisfied smile, for her winter's sleep. Sheets of dappled cloud were sliding slowly from the west; long bars of hazy blue hung over the southern chalk

downs which gleamed pearly grey beneath the low south-eastern sun. In the vale below, soft white flakes of mist still hung over the water meadows, and barred the dark trunks of the huge elms and poplars, whose fast-yellowing leaves came showering down at the very rustle of the western breeze, spotting the grass below. The river swirled along, glassy no more, but dingy grey with autumn rains and rotting leaves. All beyond the garden told of autumn; bright and peaceful, even in decay: but up the sunny slope of the garden itself, and to the very window sill, summer still lingered. The beds of red verbena and geranium were still brilliant, though choked with fallen leaves of acacia and plane; the canary plant, still untouched by frost, twined its delicate green leaves, and more delicate yellow blossoms, through the crimson lacework of the Virginia-creeper; and the great yellow noisette swung its long canes across the window, filling all the air with fruity fragrance.

And the good Doctor, lifting his eyes from his microscope, looked out upon it all with a quiet satisfaction, and though his lips did not move, his eyes seemed to be thanking God for it all; and thanking Him, too, perhaps, that he was still permitted to gaze upon that fair world outside. For as he gazed, he started, as if with sudden pain, and passed his hand across his eyes, with some thing like a sigh, and then looked at the microscope no more, but sat, seemingly absorbed in thought, while upon his delicate toil-worn features, and high, bland, unwrinkled forehead, and the few soft grey locks which not time—for he was scarcely fifty-five—but long labour of brain, had spared to him, there lay a hopeful calm, as of a man who had nigh done his work, and felt that he had not altogether done it ill;—an autumnal calm, resigned, yet full of cheerfulness, which harmonized fitly with the quiet beauty of the decaying landscape before him.

"I say, Daddy, you must drop that microscope, and put on your shade. You are ruining those dear old eyes of yours again, in spite of what Alexander told you."

The Doctor took up the green shade which lay beside him, and replaced it with a sigh and a smile.

"I must use the old things now and then, till you can take my place at the microscope, Tom; or till we have, as we ought to have, a first-rate analytical chemist settled in every county-town, and paid, in part at least, out of the county rates."

The "Tom" who had spoken was one of two youths of eighteen, who stood in opposite corners of the bay-window, gazing out upon the landscape, but evidently with thoughts as different as were their complexions.

Tom was of that bull-terrier type so common in England; sturdy, and yet not coarse; middle-sized, deep-chested, broad-

shouldered; with small, well-knit hands and feet, large jaw, bright grey eyes, crisp brown hair, a heavy projecting brow; his face full of shrewdness and good-nature, and of humour withal, which might be at whiles a little saucy and sarcastic, to judge from the glances which he sent forth from the corners of his wicked eyes at his companion on the other side of the window. He was evidently prepared for a day's shooting, in velveteen jacket and leather gaiters, and stood feeling about in his pockets to see whether he had forgotten any of his tackle, and muttering to himself amid his whistling,—"Capital day. How the birds will lie. Where on earth is old Mark? Why must he wait to smoke his cigar after breakfast? Couldn't he have had it in the trap, the blessed old chimney that he is?"

The other lad was somewhat taller than Tom, awkwardly and plainly dressed, but with a highly-developed Byronic turn-down collar, and long black curling locks. He was certainly handsome, as far as the form of his features and brow; and would have been very handsome, but for the bad complexion which at his age so often accompanies a sedentary life, and a melancholic temper. One glance at his face was sufficient to tell that he was moody, shy, restless, perhaps discontented, perhaps ambitious and vain. He held in his hand a volume of Percy's Reliques, which he had just taken down from Thurnall's shelves; yet he was looking not at it, but at the landscape. Nevertheless, as he looked, one might have seen that he was thinking not so much of it as of his own thoughts about it. His eye, which was very large, dark, and beautiful, with heavy lids and long lashes, had that dreamy look so common among men of the poetic temperament; conscious of thought, if not conscious of self; and as his face kindled, and his lips moved more and more earnestly, he began muttering to himself half-aloud, till Tom Thurnall burst into an open laugh.

"There's Jack at it again! making poetry, I'll bet my head to a China orange."

"And why not?" said his father, looking up quietly, but reprovingly, as Jack winced and blushed, and a dark shade of impatience passed across his face.

"Oh! it's no concern of mine. Let everybody please themselves. The country looks very pretty, no doubt, I can tell that; only my notion is, that a wise man ought to go out and enjoy it—as I am going to do—with a gun on his shoulder, instead of poking at home like a yard-dog, and behowling oneself in po-o-oetry;" and Tom lifted up his voice into a doleful mastiff's howl.

"Then be as good as your word, Tom, and let every one please themselves," said the Doctor; but the dark youth broke out in sudden passion.

"Mr. Thomas Thurnall! I will not endure this!

you always making me your butt,—insulting me, Sir, even in your father's house? You do not understand me; and I do not care to understand you. If my presence is disagreeable to you, I can easily relieve you of it!" and the dark youth turned to go away like Naaman, in a rage.

"Stop, John," said the Doctor. "I think it would be the more courteous plan for Tom to relieve you of his presence. Go and find Mark, Tom; and please to remember that John Briggs is my guest, and that I will not allow any rudeness to him in my house."

"I'll go, Daddy, to the world's end, if you like, provided you won't ask me to write poetry. But Jack takes offence so soon. Give us your hand, old tinder-box! I meant no harm, and you know it."

John Briggs took the proffered hand sulkily enough; and Tom went out of the glass door, whistling as merry as a cricket.

"My dear boy," said the Doctor, when they were alone, "you must try to curb this temper of yours. Don't be angry with me, but—"

"I should be an ungrateful brute if I was, Sir. I can bear anything from you. I ought to, for I owe everything to you; but—"

"But, my dear boy—'better is he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.'"

John Briggs tapped his foot on the ground impatiently. "I cannot help it, Sir. It will drive me mad, I think at times,—this contrast between what I might be, and what I am. I can bear it no longer—mixing medicines here, when I might be educating myself, distinguishing myself—for I can do it; have you not said as much yourself to me again and again?"

"I have, of course; but—"

"But, Sir, only hear me. It is in vain to ask me to command my temper while I stay here. I am not fit for this work; not fit for the dull country. I am not appreciated, not understood; and I shall never be, till I can get to London,—till I can find congenial spirits, and take my rightful place in the great parliament of mind. I am Pegasus in harness, here!" cried the vain, discontented youth. "Let me but once get there,—amid art, civilization, intellect, and the company of men like that old Mermaid Club, to hear and to answer—

> 'words,
> So nimble, and so full of subtle flame,
> As one had put his whole soul in a jest;'—

and then you shall see whether Pegasus has not wings, and can use them too!" And he stopped suddenly, choking with emotion, his nostril and chest dilating, his foot stamping impatiently on the ground.

The Doctor watched him with a sad smile.

"Do you remember the devil's temptation of our Lord—'Cast thyself down from hence; for, it is written, He shall give his angels charge over thee?'"

"I do; but what has that to do with me?"

"Throw away the safe station in which God has certainly put you, to seek, by some desperate venture, a new, and, as you fancy, a grander one for yourself? Look out of that window, lad; is there not poetry enough, beauty and glory enough, in that sky, those fields,—ay, in every fallen leaf,—to employ all your powers, considerable as I believe them to be? Why spurn the pure, quiet, country life, in which such men as Wordsworth have been content to live and grow old?"

The boy shook his head like an impatient horse. "Too slow—too slow for me, to wait and wait, as Wordsworth did, through long years of obscurity, misconception, ridicule. No. What I have, I must have at once; and, if it must be, die like Chatterton—if only, like Chatterton, I can have my little day of success, and make the world confess that another priest of the beautiful has arisen among men."

Now, it can scarcely be denied, that the good Doctor was guilty of a certain amount of weakness in listening patiently to all this rant. Not that the rant was very blameable in a lad of eighteen; for have we not all, while we are going through our course of Shelley, talked very much the same abominable stuff, and thought ourselves the grandest fellows upon earth on account of that very length of ear which was patent to all the world save our precious selves; blinded by our self-conceit, and wondering in wrath why everybody was laughing at us? But the truth is, the Doctor was easy and indulgent to a fault, and dreaded nothing so much, save telling a lie, as hurting people's feelings; beside, as the acknowledged wise man of Whitbury, he was a little proud of playing the Mæcenas; and he had, and not unjustly, a high opinion of John Briggs' powers. So he had lent him books, corrected his taste in many matters, and, by dint of petting and humouring, had kept the wayward youth half-a-dozen times from running away from his father, who was an apothecary in the town, and from the general practitioner, Mr. Bolus, under whom John Briggs fulfilled the office of co-assistant with Tom Thurnall. Plenty of trouble had both the lads given the Doctor in the last five years, but of very different kinds. Tom, though he was in everlasting hot water, as the most incorrigible scapegrace for ten miles round, contrived to confine his naughtiness strictly to play-hours, while he learnt everything which was to be learnt with marvellous quickness, and so utterly fulfilled the ideal of a bottle-boy (for of him, too, as of all things, I presume, an ideal exists eternally in

the supra-sensual Platonic universe), that Bolus told his father,—"In hours, sir, he takes care of my business as well as I could myself; but ou' of hours, sir, I believe he is possessed by seven devils."

John Briggs, on the other hand, sinned in the very opposite direction. Too proud to learn his business, and too proud also to play the scapegrace as Tom did, he neglected alike work and amusement, for lazy mooning over books, and the dreams which books called up. He made perpetual mistakes in the shop; and then considered himself insulted by an "inferior spirit," if poor Bolus called him to account for it. Indeed, had it not been for many applications of that "precious oil of unity," with which the good Doctor daily anointed the creaking wheels of Whitbury society, John Briggs and his master would have long ago "broken out of gear," and parted company in mutual wrath and fury. And now, indeed, the critical moment seemed come at last; for the lad began afresh to declare his deliberate intention of going to London to seek his fortune, in spite of parents and all the world.

"To live on here, and never to rise, perhaps, above the post of correspondent to a country newspaper!—To publish a volume of poems by subscription and have to go round, hat in hand, begging five shillings' worth of patronage from every stupid country squire—intolerable! I must go! Shakspeare was never Shakspeare till he fled from miserable Stratford, to become at once the friend of Sidney and Southampton."

"But John Briggs will be John Briggs still, if he went to the moon," shouted Tom Thurnall, who had just come up to the window. "I advise you to change that name of yours, Jack, to Sidney, or Percy, or Walker if you like; anything but the illustrious surname of Briggs the poisoner!"

"What do you mean, Sir?" thundered John, while the Doctor himself jumped up; for Tom was red with rage.

"What is this, Tom?"

"What's that?" screamed Tom, bursting, in spite of his passion, into roars of laughter. "What's that?"—and he held out a phial. "Smell it! taste it! Oh, if I had but a gallon of it to pour down your throat! That's what you brought Mark Armsworth last night, instead of his cough mixture, while your brains were wool-gathering after poetry!"

"What is it?" gasped John Briggs.

"Miss Twiddle's black dose;—strong enough to rive the gizzard out of an old cock!"

"It's not!"

"It is!" roared Mark Armsworth from behind, as he rushed in, in shooting-jacket and gaiters, his red face redder with fury,

his red whiskers standing on end with wrath like a tiger's, his left hand upon his hapless hypogastric region, his right brandishing an empty glass, which smelt strongly of brandy and water. "It is! And you've given me the cholera, and spoilt my day's shooting: and if I don't serve you out for it there's no law in England!"

"And spoilt my day's shooting, too; the last I shall get before I'm off to Paris! To have a day in Lord Minchampstead's preserves, and to be baulked of it in this way!"

John Briggs stood as one astonied.

"If I don't serve you out for this!" shouted Mark.

"If I don't serve you out for it! You shall never hear the last of it!" shouted Tom. "I'll take to writing, after all. I'll put it in the papers. I'll make the name of Briggs the poisoner an abomination in the land."

John Briggs turned and fled.

"Well!" said Mark, "I must spend my morning at home, I suppose. So I shall just sit and chat with you, Doctor."

"And I shall go and play with Molly," said Tom, and walked off to Armsworth's garden.

"I don't care for myself so much," said Mark; "but I'm sorry the boy's lost his last day's shooting."

"Oh, you will be well enough by noon, and can go then; and as for the boy, it is just as well for him not to grow too fond of sports in which he can never indulge."

"Never indulge? Why not? He vows he'll go to the Rocky Mountains, and shoot a grizzly bear; and he'll do it."

"He has a great deal to do before that, poor fellow; and a great deal to learn."

"And he'll learn it. You're always down-hearted about the boy, Doctor."

"I can't help feeling the parting with him; and for Paris, too:—such a seat of temptation. But it is his own choice; and, after all, he must see temptation, wherever he goes."

"Bless the man! if a boy means to go to the bad, he'll go just as easily in Whitbury as in Paris. Give the lad his head, and never fear; he'll fall on his legs like a cat, I'll warrant him, whatever happens. He's as steady as old Time, I tell you; there's a grey head on green shoulders there."

"Steady?" said the Doctor, with a smile and a shrug.

"Steady, I tell you at heart; as prudent as you or I; and never lost you a farthing, that you know. Hang good boys! give me one who knows how to be naughty in the right place; I wouldn't give sixpence for a good boy: I never was one myself, and have no faith in them. Give me the lad who has more steam up than he knows what to do with, and must needs blow off a

little in larks. When once he settles down on the rail, it'll send him along as steady as a luggage-train. Did you never hear a locomotive puffing and roaring before it gets under way? well, that's what your boy is doing. Look at him now, with my poor little Molly."

Tom was cantering about the garden with a little weakly child of eight in his arms. The little thing was looking up in his face with delight, screaming at his jokes.

"You are right, Mark: the boy's heart cannot be in the wrong place while he is so fond of little children."

"Poor Molly! How she'll miss him! Do you think she'll ever walk, Doctor?"

"I do indeed."

"Hum! ah! well! if she grows up, Doctor, and don't go to join her poor dear mother up there, I don't know that I'd wish her a better husband than your boy."

"It would be a poor enough match for her."

"Tut! she'll have the money, and he the brains. Mark my words, Doctor, that boy'll be a credit to you; he'll make a noise in the world, or I know nothing. And if his fancy holds seven years hence, and he wants still to turn traveller, let him. If he's minded to go round the world, I'll back him to go, somehow or other, or I'll eat my head, Ned Thurnall!"

The Doctor acquiesced in this hopeful theory, partly to save an argument; for Mark's reverence for his opinion was confined to scientific matters; and he made up to his own self-respect by patronising the Doctor, and, indeed, taking him sometimes pretty sharply to task on practical matters.

"Best fellow alive is Thurnall; but not a man of business, poor fellow. None of your geniuses are. Don't know what he'd do without me."

So Tom carried Mary about all the morning, and went to Minchampstead in the afternoon, and got three hours' good shooting; but in the evening he vanished; and his father went into Armsworth's to look for him.

"Why do you want to know where he is?" replied Mark, looking sly. "However, as you can't stop him now, I'll tell you. He is just about this time sewing up Briggs' coat-sleeves, putting copperas into his water jug, and powdered galls on his towel, and making various other little returns for this morning's favour."

"I dislike practical jokes."

"So do I; especially when they come in the form of a black dose. Sit down, old boy, and we'll have a game at cribbage."

"In a few minutes Tom came in—"Here's a good riddance

The poisoner has fabricated his pilgrim's staff, to speak scientifically, and perambulated his calcareous strata."

"What!"

"Cut his stick, and walked his chalks; and is off to London."

"Poor boy," said the Doctor, much distressed.

"Don't cry, Daddy; you can't bring him back again. He's been gone these four hours. I went to his room, at Bolus's, about a little business, and saw at once that he had packed up, and carried off all he could. And, looking about, I found a letter directed to his father. So to his father I took it; and really I was sorry for the poor people. I left them all crying in chorus."

"I must go to them at once;" and up rose the Doctor.

"He's not worth the trouble you take for him—the addle-headed, ill-tempered coxcomb," said Mark. "But it's just like your soft-heartedness. Tom, sit down, and finish the game with me."

So vanished from Whitbury, with all his aspirations, poor John Briggs; and save an occasional letter to his parents, telling them that he was alive and well, no one heard anything of him for many a year. The Doctor tried to find him out in London, again and again; but without success. His letters had no address upon them, and no clue to his whereabouts could be found.

And Tom Thurnall went to Paris, and became the best pistol-shot and billiard-player in the Quartier Latin; and then went to St. Mumpsimus's Hospital in London, and became the best boxer therein, and captain of the eight-oar, besides winning prizes and certificates without end, and becoming in due time the most popular house-surgeon in the hospital: but nothing could keep him permanently at home. Stay drudging in London he would not. Settle down in a country practice he would not. Cost his father a farthing he would not. So he started forth into the wide world with nothing but his wits and his science, as anatomical professor to a new college in some South American republic. Unfortunately, when he got there, he found that the annual revolution had just taken place, and that the party who had founded the college had been all shot the week before. Whereat he whistled, and started off again, no man knew whither.

"Having got round half the world, Daddy," he wrote home, "it's hard if I don't get round the other half. So don't expect me till you see me; and take care of your dear old eyes."

With which he vanished into infinite space, and was only heard of by occasional letters dated from the Rocky Mountains (where he did shoot a grizzly bear), the Spanish West Indies, Otahiti, Singapore, the Falkland Islands, and all manner of unexpected places; sending home valuable notes (sometimes

accompanied by valuable specimens), zoological and botanical; and informing his father that he was doing very well; that work was plentiful, and that he always found two fresh jobs before he had finished one old one.

His eldest brother, John, died meanwhile. His second brother, William, was in good general practice in Manchester. His father's connexions supported him comfortably; and if the old Doctor ever longed for Tom to come home, he never hinted it to the wanderer, but bade him go on and prosper, and become (which he gave high promise of becoming) a distinguished man of science. Nevertheless the old man's heart sunk at last, when month after month, and at last two full years, had passed without any letter from Tom.

At last, when full four years were passed and gone since Tom started for South America, he descended from the box of the day-mail, with a serene and healthful countenance; and with no more look of interest in his face than if he had been away on a two days' visit, shouldered his carpet-bag, and started for his father's house. He stopped, however; as there appeared from the inside of the mail a face which he must surely know. A second look told him that it was none other than John Briggs. But how altered! He had grown up into a very handsome man, —tall and delicate-featured, with long black curls, and a black moustache. There was a slight stoop about his shoulders, as of a man accustomed to too much sitting and writing; and he carried an eye-glass, whether for fashion's sake, or for his eyes' sake, was uncertain. He was wrapt in a long Spanish cloak, new and good; wore well-cut trowsers, and (what Tom, of course, examined carefully) French boots, very neat, and very thin. Moreover, he had lavender kid-gloves on. Tom looked and wondered, and walked half round him, sniffing like a dog when he examines into the character of a fellow dog.

"Hum!—his mark seems to be at present P. P.—prosperous party: so there can be no harm in renewing our acquaintance. What trade on earth does he live by, though? Editor of a newspaper? or keeper of a gambling-table? Begging his pardon, he looks a good deal more like the latter than the former. However—"

And he walked up and offered his hand, with "How de' do, Briggs? Who would have thought of our falling from the skies against each other in this fashion?"

Mr. Briggs hesitated a moment, and then took coldly the offered hand.

"Excuse me; but the circumstances of my visit here are too painful to allow me to wish for society."

And Mr. Briggs withdrew, evidently glad to escape.

"Has he vampoosed with the contents of a till, that he wishes so for solitude?" asked Tom; and, shouldering his carpet-bag a second time, with a grim inward laugh, he went to his father's house, and hung up his hat in the hall, just as if he had come in from a walk, and walked into the study; and not finding the old man, stepped through the garden to Mark Armsworth's, and in at the drawing-room window, frightening out of her wits a short, pale, ugly girl of seventeen, whom he discovered to be his old play-fellow, Mary. However, she soon recovered her equanimity: he certainly never lost his.

"How de' do, darling? How you are grown! and how well you look! How's your father? I hadn't anything particular to do, so I thought I'd come home and see you all, and get some fishing."

And Mary, who had longed to throw her arms round his neck, as of old, and was restrained by the thought that she was grown a great girl now, called in her father, and all the household; and after a while the old Doctor came home, and the fatted calf was killed, and all made merry over the return of this altogether unrepentant prodigal son, who, whether from affectation. or from that blunted sensibility which often comes by continual change and wandering, took all their affection and delight with the most provoking coolness.

Nevertheless, though his feelings were not "demonstrative," as fine ladies say now-a-days, he evidently had some left in some corner of his heart; for after the fatted calf was eaten, and they were all settled in the Doctor's study, it came out that his carpet-bag contained little but presents, and those valuable ones—rare minerals from the Ural for his father; a pair of Circassian pistols for Mark; and for little Mary, to her astonishment, a Russian malachite bracelet, at which Mary's eyes opened wide, and old Mark said—

"Pretty fellow you are, to go fooling your money away like that. What did that gimcrack cost, pray, Sir?"

"That is no concern of yours, Sir, or mine either; for I didn't pay for it."

"Oh!" said Mary, doubtingly.

"No, Mary. I killed a giant, who was carrying off a beautiful princess; and this, you see, he wore as a ring on one of his fingers: so I thought it would just suit your wrist."

"Oh, Tom—Mr. Thurnall—what nonsense!"

"Come, come," said his father; "instead of telling us these sort of stories, you ought to give an account of yourself, as you seem quite to forget that we have not heard from you for more than two years."

"Whew! I wrote," said Tom, "whenever I could. However, you can have all my letters in one now."

So they sat round the fire, and Tom gave an account of himself; while his father marked with pride that the young man had grown and strengthened in body and in mind; and that under that nonchalant, almost cynical outside, the heart still beat honest and kindly. For before Tom began, he would needs draw his chair closer to his father's, and half-whispered to him,—

"This is very jolly. I can't be sentimental, you know. Knocking about the world has beat all that out of me: but it is very comfortable, after all, to find oneself with a dear old daddy, and a good coal fire."

"Which of the two could you best do without?"

"Well, one takes things as one finds them. It don't do to look too deeply into one's feelings. Like chemicals, the more you analyse them, the worse they smell."

So Tom began his story.

"You heard from me at Bombay; after I'd been up to the Himalaya with an old Mumpsimus friend?"

"Yes."

"Well, I worked my way to Suez on board a ship whose doctor had fallen ill; and then I must needs see a little of Egypt; and there robbed was I, and nearly murdered, too; but I take a good deal of killing."

"I'll warrant you do," said Mark, looking at him with pride.

"So I begged my way to Cairo; and there I picked up a Yankee—a New Yorker, made of money, who had a yacht at Alexandria, and travelled *en prince;* and nothing would serve him but I must go with him to Constantinople; but there he and I quarrelled—more fools, both of us! I wrote to you from Constantinople."

"We never got the letter."

"I can't help that; I wrote. But there I was on the wide world again. So I took up with a Russian prince, whom I met at a gambling-table in Pera,—a mere boy, but such a plucky one,—and went with him to Circassia, and up to Astrakhan, and on to the Kirghis steppes; and there I did see snakes."

"Snakes?" says Mary. "I should have thought you had seen plenty in India already."

"Yes, Mary! but these were snakes spiritual and metaphorical. For, poking about where we had no business, Mary, the Tartars caught us, and tied us to their horses' tails, after giving me this scar across the cheek, and taught us to drink mares' milk, and to do a good deal of dirty work beside. So there we stayed with them six months, and observed their manners, which were none, and their customs, which were disgusting, as the midshipman said in his diary; and had the honour of visiting a pleasant little place in No-man's Land, called Khiva, which you may

find in your atlas, Mary; and of very nearly being sold for slaves into Persia, which would not have been pleasant; and at last, Mary, we ran away—or rather, rode away, on two razor-backed Calmuc ponies, and got back to Russia, *viâ* Orenberg,—for which consult your atlas again; so the young prince was restored to the bosom of his afflicted family; and a good deal of trouble I had to get him safe there, for the poor boy's health gave way. They wanted me to stay with them, and offered to make my fortune."

"I'm so glad you didn't," said Mary.

"Well—I wanted to see little Mary again, and two worthy old gentlemen beside, you see. However, those Russians are generous enough. They filled my pockets, and heaped me with presents; that bracelet among them. What's more, Mary, I've been introduced to old Nick himself, and can testify, from personal experience, to the correctness of Shakspeare's opinion that the prince of darkness is a gentleman."

"And now you are going to stay at home?" asked the Doctor.

"Well, if you'll take me in, Daddy, I'll send for my traps from London, and stay a month or so."

"A month!" cried the forlorn father.

"Well, Daddy, you see, there is a chance of more fighting in Mexico, and I shall see such practice there; beside meeting old friends who were with me in Texas. And—and I've got a little commission, too, down in Georgia, that I should like to go and do."

"What is that?"

"Well,—it's a long story and a sad one:—but there was a poor Yankee surgeon with the army in Circassia—a Southerner, and a very good fellow; and he had taken a fancy to some coloured girl at home—poor fellow, he used to go half mad about her sometimes, when he was talking to me, for fear she should have been sold—sent to the New Orleans market, or some other devilry; and what could I say to comfort him? Well, he got his mittimus by one of Schamyl's bullets; and when he was dying, he made me promise (I hadn't the heart to refuse) to take all his savings, which he had been hoarding for years for no other purpose, and see if I couldn't buy the girl, and get her away to Canada. I was a fool for promising. It was no concern of mine; but the poor fellow wouldn't die in peace else. So what must be, must."

"Oh, go! go!" said Mary. "You will let him go, Doctor Thurnall, and see the poor girl free? Think how dreadful it must be to be a slave."

"I will, my little Miss Mary; and for more reasons than you think of. Little do you know how dreadful it is to be a slave."

"Hum!" said Mark Armsworth. "That's a queer story. Tom, have you got the poor fellow's money? Didn't lose it when you were taken by those Tartars?"

"Not I. I wasn't so green as to carry it with me. It ought to have been in England six months ago. My only fear is, it's not enough."

"Hum!" said Mark. "How much more do you think you'll want?"

"Heaven knows. There is a thousand dollars; but if she be half as beautiful as poor Wyse used to swear she was, I may want more than double that."

"If you do, pay it, and I'll pay you again. No, by George!" said Mark, "no one shall say that while Mark Armsworth had a balance at his bankers' he let a poor girl—" and, recollecting Mary's presence, he finished his sentence by sundry stamps and thumps on the table.

"You would soon exhaust your balance, if you set to work to free all poor girls who are in the same case in Georgia," said the Doctor.

"Well, what of that? Them I don't know of, and so I ain't responsible for them; but this one I do know of, and so—there, I can't argue; but, Tom, if you want the money, you know where to find it."

"Very good. By the bye—I forgot it till this moment—who should come down in the coach with me but the lost John Briggs."

"He is come too late, then," said the Doctor. "His poor father died this morning."

"Ah! then Briggs knew that he was ill? That explains the Manfredic mystery and gloom with which he greeted me."

"I cannot tell. He has written from time to time, but he has never given any address; so that no one could write in return."

"He may have known. He looked very downcast. Perhaps that explains his cutting me dead."

"Cut you?" cried Mark. "I dare say he's been doing something he's ashamed of, and don't want to be recognised. That fellow has been after no good all this while, I'll warrant. I always say he's connected with the swell mob, or croupier at a gambling-table, or something of that kind. Don't you think it's likely, now?"

Mark was in the habit of so saying for the purpose of tormenting the Doctor, who held stoutly to his old belief, that John Briggs was a very clever man, and would turn up some day as a distinguished literary character.

"Well," said Tom, "honest or not, he's thriving; came down

inside the coach, dressed in the distinguished foreigner style, with lavender kid-gloves, and French boots."

"Just like a swell pickpocket," said Mark. "I always told you so, Thurnall."

"He had the old Byron collar, and Raphael hair, though."

"Nasty, effeminate, un-English foppery," grumbled Mark; "so he may be in the scribbling line after all."

"I'll go and see if I can find him," quoth the Doctor.

"Bother you," said Mark, "always running out o'nights after somebody else's business, instead of having a jolly evening. You stay, Tom, like a sensible fellow, and tell me and Mary some more travellers' lies. Had much sporting, boy?"

"Hum! I've shot and hunted every beast, I think, shootable and huntable, from a humming-bird to an elephant; and I had some splendid fishing in Canada; but, after all, give me a Whitbury trout, on a single-handed Chevalier. We'll at them to-morrow, Mr. Armsworth."

"We will, my boy! never so many fish in the river as this year, or in season so early."

The good Doctor returned; but with no news which could throw light on the history of the now mysterious Mr. John Briggs. He had locked himself into the room with his father's corpse, evidently in great excitement and grief; spent several hours in walking up and down there alone; and had then gone to an attorney in the town, and settled everything about the funeral "in the handsomest way," said the man of law; "and was quite the gentlemen in his manner, but not much of a man of business; never had even thought of looking for his father's will; and was quite surprised when I told him that there ought to be a fair sum —eight hundred or a thousand, perhaps, to come in to him, if the stock and business were properly disposed of. So he went off to London by the evening mail, and told me to address him at the post-office in some street off the Strand. Queer business, Sir, isn't it?"

John Briggs did not reappear till a few minutes before his father's funeral, witnessed the ceremony evidently with great sorrow, bowed off silently all who attempted to speak to him, and returned to London by the next coach—leaving matter for much babble among all Whitbury gossips. One thing at least was plain, that he wished to be forgotten in his native town; and forgotten he was, in due course of time.

Tom Thurnall staid his month at home, and then went to America; whence he wrote home, in about six months, a letter, of which only one paragraph need interest us.

"Tell Mark I have no need for his dollars. I have done the deed; and, thanks to the underground railway, done it nearly

gratis; which was both cheaper than buying her, and infinitely better for me; so that she has all poor Wyse's dollars to start with afresh in Canada. I write this from New York. I could accompany her no further; for I must get back to the South in time for the Mexican expedition."

Then came a long and anxious silence; and then a letter, not from Mexico, but from California,—one out of several which had been posted; and then letters, more regularly from Australia. Sickened with Californian life, he had crossed the Pacific once more, and was hard at work in the diggings, doctoring and gold-finding by turns.

"A rolling stone gathers no moss," said his father.

"He has the pluck of a hound, and the cunning of a fox," said Mark; and he'll be a credit to you yet."

And Mary prayed every morning and night for her old play-fellow; and so the years slipped on till the autumn of 1853.

As no one has heard of Tom now for eight months and more (the pulse of Australian postage being of a somewhat intermittent type), we may as well go and look for him.

A sheet of dark rolling ground, quarried into a gigantic rabbit burrow, with hundreds of tents and huts dotted about among the heaps of rubbish; dark evergreen forests in the distance, and, above all, the great volcanic mountain of Buninyong towering far aloft—these are the "Black Hills of Ballarat;" and that windlass at that shaft's mouth belongs in part to Thomas Thurnall.

At the windlass are standing two men, whom we may have seen in past years, self-satisfied in countenance, and spotless in array, sauntering down Piccadilly any July afternoon, or lounging in Haggis's stable-yard at Cambridge any autumn morning. Alas! how changed from the fast young undergraduates, with powers of enjoyment only equalled by their powers of running into debt, are those two black-bearded and mud-bespattered ruffians, who once were Smith and Brown of Trinity. Yet who need pity them, as long as they have stouter limbs, healthier stomachs, and clearer consciences, than they have had since they left Eton at seventeen? Would Smith have been a happier man as a briefless barrister in a dingy Inn of Law, peeping now and then into third-rate London society, and scribbling for the daily press? Would Brown have been a happier man had he been forced into those holy orders for which he never felt the least vocation, to pay off his college debts out of his curate's income, and settle down on his lees, at last, in the family living of Nomansland-cum-Clayhole, and support a wife and five children on five hundred a-year, exclusive of rates and taxes? Let them dig, and be men.

The windlass rattles, and the rope goes down. A shout from the bottom of the shaft proclaims all right; and in due time,

sitting in the noose of the rope, up comes Thomas Thurnall, bare-footed and bare-headed, in flannel trousers and red jersey, begrimed with slush and mud; with a mahogany face, a brick-red neck, and a huge brown beard, looking, to use his own expression, "as jolly as a sandboy."

"A letter for you, Doctor, from Europe."

Tom takes it, and his countenance falls; for it is black-edged and black-sealed. The handwriting is Mary Armsworth's.

"I suppose the old lady who is going to leave me a fortune is dead," says he, drily, and turns away to read.

"Bad luck, I suppose," he says to himself. "I have not had any for full six months, so I suppose it is time for Dame Fortune to give me a sly stab again. I only hope it is not my father; for, begging the Dame's pardon, I can bear any trick of hers but that." And he sets his teeth doggedly, and reads.

"My dear Mr. Thurnall,—My father would have written himself, but he thought, I don't know why, that I could tell you better than he. Your father is quite well in health,"—Thurnall breathes freely again—"but he has had heavy trials since your poor brother William's death."

Tom opens his eyes and sets his teeth more firmly. "Willy dead? I suppose there is a letter lost: better so; better to have the whole list of troubles together, and so get them sooner over. Poor Will!"

"Your father caught the scarlet fever from him, while he was attending him, and was very ill after he came back. He is quite well again now; but if I must tell you the truth, the disease has affected his eyes. You know how weak they always were, and how much worse they have grown of late years; and the doctors are afraid that he has little chance of recovering the sight, at least of the left eye."

"Recovering? He's blind, then." And Tom set his teeth more tightly than ever. He felt a sob rise in his throat, but choked it down, shaking his head like an impatient bull.

"Wait a bit, Tom," said he to himself, "before you have it out with Dame Fortune. There's more behind, I'll warrant. News like this lies in pockets, and not in single nuggets." And he read on—

"And—for it is better you should know all—something has happened to the railroad in which he had invested so much. My father has lost money in it also; but not much: but I fear that your poor dear father is very much straitened. My father is dreadfully vexed about it, and thinks it all his fault in not having watched the matter more closely, and made your father sell out in time: and he wants your father to come and live with us; but he will not hear of it. So he has given up the old

house, and taken one in Water-street, and, oh! I need not tell you that we are there every day, and that I am trying to make him as happy as I can—but what can I do?" And then followed kind womanly common-places, which Tom hurried over with fierce impatience.

"He wants you to come home; but my father has entreated him to let you stay. You know, while we are here, he is safe; and my father begs you not to come home, if you are succeeding as well as you have been doing."

There was much more in the letter, which I need not repeat; and, after all, a short postscript, by Mark himself, followed:—

"Stay where you are, boy, and keep up heart; while I have a pound, your father shall have half of it; and you know Mark Armsworth."

He walked away slowly into the forest. He felt that the crisis of his life was come; that he must turn his hand henceforth to quite new work; and as he went he "took stock," as it were, of his own soul, to see what point he had attained—what he could do.

Fifteen years of adventure had hardened into wrought metal a character never very ductile. Tom was now, in his own way, an altogether accomplished man of the world, who knew (at least in all companies and places where he was likely to find himself) exactly what to say, to do, to make, to seek, and to avoid. Shifty and thrifty as old Greek, or modern Scot, there were few things he could not invent, and perhaps nothing he could not endure. He had watched human nature under every disguise, from the pomp of the ambassador to the war-paint of the savage, and formed his own clear, hard, shallow, practical estimate thereof. He looked on it as his raw material, which he had to work up into subsistence and comfort for himself. He did not wish to live on men, but live by them he must; and for that purpose he must study them, and especially their weaknesses. He would not cheat them; for there was in him an innate vein of honesty, so surly and explosive, at times, as to give him much trouble. The severest part of his self-education had been the repression of his dangerous inclination to call a sham a sham on the spot, and to answer fools according to their folly. That youthful rashness, however, was now well-nigh subdued, and Tom could flatter and bully also, when it served his turn—as who cannot? Let him that is without sin among my readers, cast the first stone. Self-conscious he was, therefore, in every word and action; not from morbid vanity, but a necessary consequence of his mode of life. He had to use men, and therefore to watch how he used them; to watch every word, gesture, tone of voice, and, in all times and places, do the fitting thing. It was hard work: but necessary for a man who stood alone and self-

poised in the midst of the universe; fashioning for himself everywhere, just as far as his arm could reach, some not intolerable condition; depending on nothing but himself, and caring for little but himself and the father whom, to do him justice, he never forgot. If I wished to define Tom Thurnall by one epithet, I should call him specially an ungodly man—were it not that scriptural epithets have, now-a-days, such altogether conventional and official meanings, that one fears to convey, in using them, some notion quite foreign to the truth. Tom was certainly not one of those ungodly whom David had to deal with of old, who robbed the widow, and put the fatherless to death. His morality was as high as that of the average; his sense of honour far higher. He was generous and kind-hearted. No one ever heard him tell a lie; and he had a blunt honesty about him, half real, because he liked to be honest, and yet half affected too, because he found it pay in the long run, and because it threw off their guard the people whom he intended to make his tools. But of godliness in its true sense—of belief that any Being above cared for him, and was helping him in the daily business of life—that it was worth while asking that Being's advice, or that any advice would be given if asked for; of any practical notion of a Heavenly Father, or a Divine education—Tom was as ignorant as thousands of respectable people who go to church every Sunday, and read good books, and believe firmly that the Pope is Antichrist. He ought to have learnt it, no doubt; for his father was a religious man: but he had not learnt it—any more than thousands learn it, who have likewise religious parents. He had been taught, of course, the common doctrines and duties of religion; but early remembrances had been rubbed out, as off a schoolboy's slate, by the mere current of new thoughts and objects, in his continual wanderings. Disappointments he had had, and dangers in plenty; but only such as rouse a brave and cheerful spirit to bolder self-reliance and invention; not those deep sorrows of the heart which leave a man helpless in the lowest pit, crying for help from without, for there is none within. He had seen men of all creeds, and had found in all alike (so he held) the many rogues, and the few honest men. All religions were, in his eyes, equally true and equally false. Superior morality was owing principally to the influences of race and climate; and devotional experiences (to judge, at least, from American camp-meetings and popish cities) the results of a diseased nervous system.

Upon a man so hard and strong this fearful blow had fallen, and, to do him justice, he took it like a man. He wandered on and on for an hour or more, up the hills, and into the forest, talking to himself.

"Poor old Willy! I should have liked to have looked into his honest face before he went, if only to make sure that we were good friends. I used to plague him sadly with my tricks. But what is the use of wishing for what cannot be? I recollect I had just the same feeling when John died; and yet I got over it after a time, and was as cheerful as if he were alive again, or had never lived at all. And so I shall get over this. Why should I give way to what I know will pass, and is meant to pass? It is my father I feel for. But I couldn't be there; and it is no fault of mine that I was not there. No one told me what was going to happen; and no one could know: so again,—why grieve over what can't be helped?"

And then, to give the lie to all his cool arguments, he sat down among the fern, and burst into a violent fit of crying. "Oh, my poor dear old daddy!"

Yes; beneath all the hard crust of years, that fountain of life still lay pure as when it came down from heaven—love for his father.

"Come, come, this won't do; this is not the way to take stock of my goods, either mental or worldly. I can't cry the dear old man out of this scrape."

He looked up. The sun was setting. Beneath the dark roof of evergreens the eucalyptus boles stood out, like basalt pillars, black against a background of burning flame. The flying foxes shot from tree to tree, and moths as big as sparrows whirred about the trunks, one moment black against the glare beyond, and vanishing the next, like imps of darkness, into their native gloom. There was no sound of living thing around, save the ghastly rattle of the dead bark-tassels which swung from every tree, and far away, the faint clicking of the diggers at their work, like the rustle of a gigantic ant-hill. Was there one among them all who cared for him? who would not forget him in a week with—"Well, he was pleasant company, poor fellow," and go on digging without a sigh? What, if it were his fate to die, as he had seen many a stronger man, there in that lonely wilderness, and sleep for ever, unhonoured and unknown, beneath that awful forest roof, while his father looked for bread to others' hands?

No man was less sentimental, no man less superstitious than Thomas Thurnall; but crushed and softened—all but terrified (as who would not have been?)—by that day's news, he could not struggle against the weight of loneliness which fell upon him. For the first and last time, perhaps, in his life, he felt fear; a vague, awful dread of unseen and inevitable possibilities. Why should not calamity fall on him, wave after wave? Was it not falling on him already? Why should he not grow sick to-morrow,

break his leg, his neck—why not? What guarantee had he in earth or heaven that he might not be "snuffed out silently," as he had seen hundreds already, and die and leave no sign? And there sprung up in him at once the intensest yearning after his father and the haunts of his boyhood, and the wildest dread that he should never see them. Might not his father be dead ere he could return?—if ever he did return. That twelve thousand miles of sea looked to him a gulf impassable. Oh, that he were safe at home! that he could start that moment! And for one minute a helplessness, as of a lost child, came over him.

Perhaps it had been well for him had he given that feeling vent, and, confessing himself a lost child, cried out of the darkness to a Father; but the next minute he had dashed it proudly away.

"Pretty baby I am, to get frightened, at my time of life, because I find myself in a dark wood—and the sun shining all the while as jollily as ever away there in the west! It is morning somewhere or other now, and it will be morning here again to-morrow. 'Good times and bad times, and all times pass over;'—I learnt that lesson out of old Bewick's vignettes, and it has stood me in good stead this many a year, and shall now. Die? Nonsense. I take more killing than that comes to. So for one more bout with old Dame Fortune. If she throws me again, why, I'll get up again, as I have any time these fifteen years. Mark's right. I'll stay here and work till I make a hit, or luck runs dry, and then home and settle; and, meanwhile, I'll go down to Melbourne to-morrow, and send the dear old man two hundred pounds; and then back again here, and to it again."

And with a fate-defiant smile, half bitter and half cheerful, Tom rose and went down again to his mates, and stopped their inquiries by—"What's done can't be mended, and needn't be mentioned; whining won't make me work the harder, and harder than ever I must work."

Strange it is, how mortal man, "who cometh up and is cut down like the flower," can thus harden himself into stoical security, and count on the morrow, which may never come. Yet so it is; and, perhaps, if it were not so, no work would get done on earth,—at least by the many who know not that God is guiding them, while they fancy that they are guiding themselves.

CHAPTER II.

STILL LIFE.

I MUST now, if I am to bring you to "Two years ago," and to my story, as it was told to me, ask you to follow me into the good old West Country, and set you down at the back of an old harbour pier; thirty feet of grey and brown boulders, spotted aloft with bright yellow lichens, and black drops of tar, polished lower down by the surge of centuries, and towards the foot of the wall roughened with crusts of barnacles, and mussel-nests in crack and cranny, and festoons of coarse dripping weed.

On a low rock at its foot, her back resting against the Cyclopean wall, sits a young woman of eight-and-twenty, soberly, almost primly dressed, with three or four tiny children clustering round her. In front of them, on a narow spit of sand between the rocks, a dozen little girls are laughing, romping, and pattering, about, turning the stones for "shannies" and "bullies," and other luckless fish left by the tide; while the party beneath the pier wall look steadfastly down into a little rock-pool at their feet,—full of the pink and green and purple cut-work of delicate weeds and coralline, and starred with great sea-dahlias, crimson and brown and grey, and with the waving snake-locks of the Cereus, pale blue, and rose-tipped like the fingers of the dawn. One delicate Medusa is sliding across the pool, by slow pantings of its crystal bell; and on it the eyes of the whole group are fixed,—for it seems to be the subject of some story which the village schoolmistress is finishing in a sweet, half-abstracted voice,—

"And so the cruel soldier was changed into a great rough red starfish, who goes about killing the poor mussels, while nobody loves him, or cares to take his part; and the poor little girl was changed into a beautiful bright jelly-fish, like that one, who swims about all day in the pleasant sunshine, with a red cross stamped on its heart."

"Oh, mistress, what a pretty story!" cry the little ones, with tearful eyes. "And what shall we be changed to when we die?"

"If we will only be good we shall go up to Jesus, and be beautiful angels, and sing hymns. Would that it might be soon, soon; for you and me, and all!" And she draws the children to her, and looks upward, as if longing to bear them with her aloft.

Let us leave the conversation where it is, and look into the face of the speaker, who, young as she is, has already meditated so long upon the mystery of death that it has grown lovely in her eyes.

Her figure is tall, graceful, and slight, the severity of its out-

lines suiting well with the severity of her dress, with the brown stuff gown and plain grey whittle. Her neck is long, almost too long: but all defects are forgotten in the first look at her face. We can see it fully, for her bonnet lies beside her on the rock.

The masque, though thin, is perfect. The brow, like that of Greek statue, looks lower than it really is, for the hair springs from below the bend of the forehead. The brain is very long, and sweeps backward and upward in grand curves, till it attains above the ears a great expanse and height. She should be a character more able to feel than to argue; full of all a woman's veneration, devotion, love of children,—perhaps, too, of a woman's anxiety.

The nose is slightly aquiline; the sharp-cut nostrils indicate a reserve of compressed strength and passion; the mouth is delicate; the lips, which are full and somewhat heavy, not from coarseness, but rather from languor, show somewhat of both the upper and the under teeth. Her eyes are bent on the pool at her feet; so that we can see nothing of them but the large sleepy lids, fringed with lashes so long and dark that the eye look as if it had been painted, in the Eastern fashion, with antimony; the dark lashes, dark eyebrows, dark hair, crisped (as West-country hair so often is) to its very roots, increase the almost ghost-like paleness of the face, not sallow, not snow-white, but of a clear, bloodless, waxen hue.

And now she lifts her eyes,—dark eyes, of preternatural largeness; brilliant, too, but not with the sparkle of the diamond; brilliant as deep clear wells are, in which the mellow moonlight sleeps fathom-deep between black walls of rock; and round them, and round the wide-opened lips, and arching eyebrow, and slightly wrinkled forehead, hangs an air of melancholy thought, vague doubt, almost of startled fear; then that expression passes, and the whole face collapses into a languor of patient sadness, which seems to say,—"I cannot solve the mystery. Let Him solve it as seems good to Him."

The pier has, as usual, two stages; the upper and narrower for a public promenade, the lower and broader one for business. Two rough collier-lads, strangers to the place, are lounging on the wall above, and begin, out of mere mischief, dropping pebbles on the group below.

"Hillo! you young rascals," calls an old man lounging like them on the wall; "if you don't drop that, you're likely to get your heads broken."

"Will you do it?"

"I would thirty years ago; but I'll find a dozen in five minutes who will do it now. Here, lads! here's two Welsh vagabonds pelting our schoolmistress."

This is spoken to a group of Sea-Titans, who are sitting about on the pier-way behind him, in red caps, blue jackets, striped jerseys, bright brown trousers, and all the picturesque comfort of a fisherman's costume, superintending the mending of a boat.

Up jump half-a-dozen off the logs and baulkings, where they have been squatting, doubled up knee to nose, after the fashion of their class, and a volley of execrations, like a storm of grape, almost blows the two offenders off the wall. The bolder, however, lingers, anathematizing in turn; whereon a black-bearded youth, some six feet four in height, catches up an oar, makes a sweep at the shins of the lad above his head, and brings him writhing down upon the upper pier-way, whence he walks off howling, and muttering threats of "taking the law." In vain; —there is not a magistrate within ten miles; and custom, Lynch-law, and the coast-guard lieutenant, settle all matters in Aberalva town, and do so easily enough; for the petty crimes which fill our gaols are all unknown among those honest Vikings' sons; and any man who covets his neighbour's goods, instead of stealing them has only to go and borrow them, on condition, of course, of lending in his turn.

"What's that collier-lad hollering about, Captain Willis?" asks Mr. Tardrew, steward to Lord Scoutbush, landlord of Aberalva, as he comes up to the old man.

"Gentleman Jan cut him over, for pelting the schoolmistress below here."

"Serve him right; he'll have to cut over that curate next, I reckon."

"Oh, Mr. Tardrew, don't you talk so; the young gentleman is as kind a man as I ever saw, and comes in and out of our house like a lamb."

"Wolf in sheep's clothing," growls Tardrew. "What d'ye think he says to me last week? Wanted to turn the schoolmistress out of her place because she went to chapel sometimes."

"I know, I know," replied Willis, in the tone of a man who wished to avoid a painful subject. "And what did you answer, then, Mr. Tardrew?"

"I told him he might if he liked; but he'd make the place too hot to hold him, if he hadn't done it already, with his bowings and his crossings, and his chantings, and his Popish Gregories,—and tells one he's no Papist; called him Pope Gregory himself. What do we want with popes' tunes here, instead of the Old Hundredth and Martyrdom? I should like to see any Pope of the lot make a tune like them."

Captain Willis listened with a face half sad, half slily amused. He and Tardrew were old friends; being the two most notable persons in the parish, save Jones the lieutenant, Heale the doctor,

and another gentleman, of whom we shall speak presently. Both of them too, were thorough-going Protestants, and, though Churchmen, walked sometimes into the Brianite Chapel of an afternoon, and thought it no sin. But each took the curate's "Puseyism" in a different way, being two men as unlike each other as one could well find.

Tardrew,—steward to Lord Scoutbush, the absentee landlord, —was a shrewd, hard-bitten, choleric old fellow, of the shape, colour, and consistence of a red brick; one of those English types which Mr. Emerson has so well hit off in his rather confused and contradictory "Traits:"—

"He hides virtues under vices, or, rather, under the semblance of them. It is the misshapen, hairy, Scandinavian Troll again who lifts the cart out of the mire, or threshes the corn which ten day-labourers could not end: but it is done in the dark, and with muttered maledictions. He is a churl with a soft place in his heart, whose speech is a brash of bitter waters, but who loves to help you at a pinch. He says, No; and serves you, and his thanks disgust you." Such was Tardrew,—a true British bull-dog, who lived pretty faithfully up to his Old Testament, but had, somehow, forgotten the existence of the New.

Willis was a very different and a very much nobler person; the most perfect specimen which I ever have met (for I knew him well, and loved him) of that type of British sailor which good Captain Marryat has painted in his Masterman Ready, and painted far better than I can, even though I do so from life. A tall and graceful old man, though stooping much from lumbago and old wounds; with snow-white air and whiskers, delicate aquiline features, the manners of a nobleman, and the heart of a child. All children knew that latter fact, and clung to him instinctively. Even "the Boys," that terrible Berserk-tribe, self-organized, self-dependent, and bound together in common iniquities and the dread of common retribution, who were in Aberalva, as all fishing towns, the torment and terror of all douce fogies, male and female,—even the Boys, I say, respected Captain Willis, so potent was the influence of his gentleness; nailed not up his shutters, nor tied fishing-lines across his doorway; tail-piped not his dog, nor sent his cat to sea on a barrel-stave; put not live crabs into his pocket, nor dead dog-fish into his well; yea, even when judgment, too long provoked, made bare her red right hand, and the lieutenant vowed by his commission that he would send half-a-dozen of them to the treadmill, they would send up a deputation to "beg Captain Willis to beg the schoolmistress to beg them off." For between Willis and that fair young creature a friendship had grown up, easily to be understood. Willis was one of those rare natures upon whose

purity no mire can cling; who pass through the furnace, and yet not even the smell of fire has passed upon them. Bred, almost born, on board a smuggling cutter, in the old war-times; then hunting, in the old coast-blockade service, the smugglers among whom he had been trained; watching the slow horrors of the Walcheren; fighting under Collingwood and Nelson, and many another valiant Captain; lounging away years of temptation on the West-Indian station, as sailing-master of a ship-of-the-line; pensioned comfortably now for many a year in his native town, he had been always the same gentle, valiant, righteous man; sober in life, strict in duty, and simple in word; a soul as transparent as crystal, and as pure. He was the oracle of Aberalva now; and even Lieutenant Brown would ask his opinion,—non-commissioned officer though he was,—in a tone which was all the more patronising, because he stood a little in awe of the old man.

But why, when the boys wanted to be begged off, was the schoolmistress to be their advocate? Because Grace Harvey exercised, without intending anything of the kind, an almost mesmeric influence on everyone in the little town. Goodness rather than talent had given her wisdom, and goodness rather than courage a power of using that wisdom, which, to those simple, superstitious folk, seemed altogether an inspiration. There was a mystery about her, too, which worked strongly on the hearts of the West-country people. She was supposed to be at times "not right;" and wandering intellect is with them, as with many primitive peoples, an object more of awe than of pity. Her deep melancholy alternated with bursts of wild eloquence, with fantastic fables, with entreaties and warnings against sin, full of such pity and pathos that they melted, at times, the hardest hearts. A whole world of strange tales, half false, half true, had grown up around her as she grew. She was believed to spend whole nights in prayer; to speak with visitors from the other world; even to have the power of seeing into futurity. The intensity of her imagination gave rise to the belief that she had only to will, and she could see whom she would, and all that they were doing, even across the seas; her exquisite sensibility, it was whispered, made her feel every bodily suffering she witnessed, as acutely as the sufferer's self, and in the very limb in which he suffered. Her deep melancholy was believed to be caused by some dark fate—by some agonizing sympathy with evil-doers; and it was sometimes said in Aberalva,—"Don't do that, for poor Grace's sake. She bears the sins of all the parish."

So it befell that Grace Harvey governed, she knew not how or why, all hearts in that wild simple fishing-town. Rough men, fighting on the quay, shook hands at Grace's bidding. Wives

who could not lure their husbands from the beer-shop, sent Grace in to fetch them home, sobered by shame: and woe to the stranger who fancied that her entrance into that noisy den gave him a right to say a rough word to the fair girl! The maidens, instead of envying her beauty, made her the confidant of all their loves; for though many a man would gladly have married her, to woo her was more than any dared; and Gentleman Jan himself, the rightful bully of the quay, as being the handsomest and biggest man for many a mile, beside owning a tidy trawler and two good mackerel-boats, had said openly, that if any man had a right to her, he supposed he had; but that he should as soon think of asking her to marry him, as of asking the moon.

But it was in the school, in the duty which lay nearest to her, that Grace's inward loveliness shone most lovely. Whatever dark cloud of melancholy lay upon her own heart, she took care that it should never overshadow one of those young innocents, whom she taught by love and ruled by love, always tender, always cheerful, even gay and playful; punishing, when she rarely punished, with tears and kisses. To make them as happy as she could in a world where there was nothing but temptation, and disappointment, and misery; to make them "fit for heaven," and then to pray that they might go thither as speedily as possible, this had been her work for now seven years; and that Manichæism which has driven darker and harder natures to destroy young children, that they might go straight to bliss, took in her the form of outpourings of gratitude (when the first natural tears were dried), as often as one of her little lambs was "delivered out of the miseries of this sinful world." But as long as they were in the world, she was their guardian angel; and there was hardly a mother in Aberalva who did not confess her debt to Grace, not merely for her children's scholarship, but for their characters.

Frank Headley the curate, therefore, had touched altogether the wrong chord when he spoke of displacing Grace. And when, that same afternoon, he sauntered down to the pier-head, wearied with his parish work, not only did Tardrew stump away in silence as soon as he appeared, but Captain Willis's face assumed a grave and severe look, which was not often to be seen on it.

"Well, Captain Willis?" said Frank, solitary and sad; longing for a talk with some one, and not quite sure whether he was welcome.

"Well, Sir?" and the old man lifted his hat, and made one of his princely bows. "You look tired, Sir; I am afraid you're doing too much."

"I shall have more to do, soon," said the Curate, his eye glancing towards the schoolmistress, who, disturbed by the noise

above, was walking slowly up the beach, with a child holding to every finger, and every fold of her dress.

Willis saw the direction of his eye, and came at once to the point, in his gentle, straightforward fashion.

"I hear you have thoughts of taking the school from her, Sir?"

"Why—indeed—I shall be very sorry; but if she will persist in going to the chapel, I cannot overlook the sin of schism."

"She takes the children to church twice a Sunday, don't she? And teaches them all that you tell her—"

"Why—yes—I have taken the religious instruction almost into my own hands now."

Willis smiled quietly.

"You'll excuse an old sailor, Sir; but I think that's more than mortal man can do. There's no hour of the day but what she's teaching them something. She's telling them Bible stories now, I'll warrant, if you could hear her."

Frank made no answer.

"You wouldn't stop her doing that? Oh, Sir," and the old man spoke with a quiet earnestness which was not without its effect, "just look at her now, like the Good Shepherd with His lambs about His feet, and think whether that's not much too pretty a sight to put an end to, in a poor sinful world like this."

"It is my duty," said Frank, hardening himself. "It pains me exceedingly, Willis;—I hope I need not tell you that."

"If I know aught of Mr. Headley's heart by his ways, you needn't indeed, Sir."

"But I cannot allow it.—Her mother a class leader among these Dissenters, and one of the most active of them, too.—The school next door to her house. The preacher, of course, has influence there, and must have. How am I to instil Church principles into them, if he is counteracting me the moment my back is turned? I have made up my mind, Willis, to do nothing in a hurry. Lady-day is past, and she must go on till Midsummer; then I shall take the school into my own hands, and teach them myself, for I can pay no mistress or master; and Mr. St. Just—"

Frank checked himself as he was going to speak the truth; namely, that his sleepy old absentee rector, Lord Scoutbush's uncle, would yawn and grumble at the move, and wondering why Frank "had not the sense to leave ill alone," would give him no manner of assistance beyond his pittance of eighty pounds a-year, and five pounds at Christmas to spend on the poor.

"Excuse me, Sir, I don't doubt that you'll do your best in teaching, as you always do: but I tell you honestly, you'll get no children to teach."

"No children?"

"Their mothers know the worth of Grace too well, and the children too, Sir; and they'll go to her all the same, do what you will; and never a one will enter the church door from that day forth."

"On their own heads be it!" said Frank, a little testily; "but I should not have fancied Miss Harvey the sort of person to set up herself in defiance of me."

"The more reason, Sir, if you'll forgive me, for your not putting upon her."

"I do not want to put upon her or any one. I will do every thing. I will—I do—work day and night for these people, Mr. Willis. I tell you, as I would my own father. I don't think I have another object on earth—if I have, I hope I shall forget it—than the parish: but Church principles I must carry out."

"Well, Sir, certainly no man ever worked here as you do. If all had been like you, Sir, there would not be a Dissenter here now; but excuse me, Sir, the Church is a very good thing, and I keep to mine, having served under her Majesty, and her Majesty's forefathers, and learnt to obey orders, I hope; but don't you think, Sir, you're taking it as the Pharisees took the Sabbath-day?"

"How then?"

"Why, as if man was made for the Church, and not the Church for man."

"That is a shrewd thought, at least. Where did you pick it up?"

"'Tis none of my own, Sir; a bit of wisdom that my maid let fall; and it has stuck to me strangely ever since."

"Your maid?"

"Yes, Grace there. I always call her my maid; having no father, poor thing, she looks up to me as one, pretty much,—the dear soul. Oh, Sir! I hope you'll think over this again, before you do anything. It's done in a day: but years won't undo it again."

So Grace's sayings were quoted against him. Her power was formidable enough, if she dare use it. He was silent awhile, and then—

"Do you think she has heard of this—of my—"

"Honesty's the best policy, Sir: she has; and that's the truth. You know how things get round."

"Well; and what did she say?"

"I'll tell you her very words, Sir; and they were these, if you'll excuse me. 'Poor dear gentleman,' says she, 'if he thinks chapel-going so wrong, why does he dare drive folks to chapel? I wonder, every time he looks at that deep sea, he don't remember what the Lord said about it, and those who cause his little ones to offend.'"

Frank was somewhat awed. The thought was new; the application of the text, as his own scholarship taught him, even more exact than Grace had fancied.

"Then she was not angry?"

"She, Sir! You couldn't anger her if you tore her in pieces with hot pincers, as they did those old martyrs she's always telling about."

"Good-bye, Willis," said Frank, in a hopeless tone of voice, and sauntered to the pier-end, down the steps, and along the lower pier-way, burdened with many thoughts. He came up to the knot of chatting sailors. Not one of them touched his cap, or moved out of the way for him. The boat lay almost across the whole pier-way; and he stopped, awkwardly enough, for there was not room to get by.

"Will you be so kind as to let me pass?" asked he, meekly enough. But no one stirred.

"Why don't you get up, Tom?" asked one.

"I be lame."

"So be I."

"The gentleman can step over me, if he likes," said big Jan; a proposition the impossibility whereof raised a horse-laugh.

"Ain't you ashamed of yourselves, lads?" said the severe voice of Willis, from above. The men rose sulkily; and Frank hastened on, as ready to cry as ever he had been in his life. Poor fellow! he had been labouring among these people for now twelve months, as no man had ever laboured before, and he felt that he had not won the confidence of a single human being,—not even of the old women, who took his teaching for the sake of his charity, and who scented popery, all the while, in words in which there was no popery, and in doctrines which were just the same, on the whole, as those of the dissenting preacher, simply because he would sprinkle among them certain words and phrases which had become "suspect," as party badges. His church was all but empty; the general excuse was, that it was a mile from the town: but Frank knew that that was not the true reason; that all the parish had got it into their heads that he had a leaning to popery; that he was going over to Rome; that he was probably a Jesuit in disguise.

Now, be it always remembered, Frank Headley was a good man, in every sense of the word. He had nothing, save the outside, in common with those undesirable coxcombs, who have not been bred by the High Church movement, but have taken refuge in its cracks, as they would have done forty years ago in those of the Evangelical,—youths who hide their crass ignorance and dulness under the cloak of Church infallibility, and having neither wit, manners, learning, humanity, or any other dignity

whereon to stand, talk loud, *pour pis aller*, about the dignity of the priesthood. Such men Frank had met at neighbouring clerical meetings, overbearing and out-talking the elder and the wiser members; and finding that he got no good from them, had withdrawn into his parish-work, to eat his own heart, like Bellerophon of old. For Frank was a gentleman, and a Christian, if ever one there was. Delicate in person, all but consumptive; graceful and refined in all his works and ways; a scholar, elegant rather than deep, yet a scholar still; full of all love for painting, architecture, and poetry, he had come down to bury himself in this remote curacy, in the honest desire of doing good. He had been a curate in a fashionable London church: but finding the atmosphere thereof not over wholesome to his soul, he had had the courage to throw off St. Nepomuc's, its brotherhoods, sisterhoods, and all its gorgeous and highly-organized appliances for enabling five thousand rich to take tolerable care of five hundred poor: and had fled from "the holy virgins" (as certain old ladies, who do twice their work with half their noise, call them) into the wilderness of Bethnal Green. But six months' gallant work there, with gallant men, (for there are High Churchmen there who are an honour to England,) brought him to death's door. The doctors commanded some soft western air. Frank, as chivalrous as a knight-errant of old, would fain have died at his post, but his mother interfered; and he could do no less than obey her. So he had taken this remote west country curacy; all the more willingly because he knew that nine-tenths of the people were Dissenters. To recover that place to the Church would be something worth living for. So he had come, and laboured late and early; and behold, he had failed utterly; and seemed further than ever from success. He had opened, too hastily, a crusade against the Dissenters, and denounced where he should have conciliated. He had overlooked—indeed he hardly knew—the sad truth, that the mere fact of his being a clergyman was no passport to the hearts of his people. For the curate who preceded him had been an old man, mean, ignorant, incapable, remaining there simply because nobody else would have him, and given to brandy-and-water as much as his flock. The rector for the last fifteen years, Lord Scoutbush's uncle, was a cypher. The rector before him had notoriously earned the living by a marriage with a lady who stood in some questionable relation to Lord Scoutbush's father, and who had never had a thought above his dinner and his tithes; and all that the Aberalva fishermen knew of God or righteousness, they had learnt from the *soi-disant* disciples of John Wesley. So Frank Headley had to make up, at starting, the arrears of half-a-century of base neglect; but instead of doing so, he had contrived to awaken against himself

that dogged hatred of popery which lies inarticulate and confused, but deep and firm, in the heart of the English people. Poor fellow! if he made a mistake, he suffered for it. There was hardly a sadder soul than poor Frank, as he went listlessly up the village street that afternoon, to his lodging at Captain Willis's, which he had taken because he preferred living in the village itself to occupying the comfortable rectory a mile out of town.

However we cannot set him straight;—after all, every man must perform that office for himself. So the best thing we can do, as we landed, naturally, at the pier-head, is to walk up-street after him, and see what sort of a place Aberalva is.

Beneath us, to the left hand, is the quay-pool, now lying dry, in which a dozen trawlers are lopping over on their sides, their red sails drying in the sun, the tails of the trawls hauled up to the topmast heads; while the more handy of their owners are getting on board by ladders, to pack away the said red sails; for it will blow to night. In the long furrows which their keels have left, and in the shallow muddy pools, lie innumerable fragments of exenterated maids (not human ones, pitiful reader, but belonging to the order Pisces, and the family Raia), and some twenty non-exenterated ray-dogs and picked dogs (Anglice, dog-fish), together with a fine basking shark, at least nine feet long, out of which the kneeling Mr. George Thomas, clothed in pilot cloth patches of every hue, bright scarlet, blue, and brown (not to mention a large square of white canvas which has been let into that part of his trousers which is now uppermost), is dissecting the liver, for the purpose of greasing his "sheaves" with the fragrant oil thereof. The pools in general are bedded with black mud, and creamed over with oily flakes which may proceed from the tar on the vessels' sides, and may also from "decomposing animal matter," as we euphemize it now-a-days. The hot pebbles, at high tide mark,—crowned with a long black row of herring and mackerel boats, laid up in ordinary for the present,—are beautifully variegated with mackerel's heads, gurnets' fins, old hag, lob-worm, and mussel-baits, and the inwards of a whole ichthyological museum; save at one spot where the Cloaca maxima and Port Esquiline of Aberalva town (small enough, considering the place holds fifteen hundred souls) murmurs from beneath a grey stone arch toward the sea, not unfraught with dead rats and cats, who, their ancient feud forgotten, combine lovingly at last in increasing the health of the blue-trousered urchins who are sailing upon that Acherontic stream bits of board with a feather stuck in it, or of their tiny sisters, who are dancing about in the dirtiest pool among the trawlers in a way which (if your respectable black coat be seen upon the pier) will elicit from one of the

balconied windows above, decked with reeking shirts and linen, some such shriek as—

"Patience Penberthy, Patience Penberthy—a! You nasty, dirty, little ondecent hussy—a! What be playing in the quay-pool for—a! A pulling up your pesticoats before the quality—a!" Each exclamation being followed with that droning grunt, with which the West-country folk, after having screamed their lungs empty through their noses, recover their breath for a fresh burst.

Never mind; it is no nosegay, certainly, as a whole: but did you ever see sturdier, rosier, nobler-looking children,—rounder faces, raven hair, bright grey eyes, full of fun and tenderness? As for the dirt, that cannot harm them; poor people's children must be dirty—why not? Look on fifty yards to the left. Between two ridges of high pebble bank, some twenty yards apart, comes Alva river rushing to the sea. On the opposite ridge, a low white house, with three or four white canvas-covered boats, and a flag-staff with sloping cross-yard, betokens the coast-guard station. Beyond it rise black jagged cliffs; mile after mile of iron-bound wall: and here and there, at the glens' mouths, great banks and denes of shifting sand. In front of it, upon the beach, are half-a-dozen great green and grey heaps of Welsh lime-stone; behind it, at the cliff foot, is the lime-kiln, with its white dusty heaps, and brown dusty men, its quivering mirage of hot air, its strings of patient hay-nibbling donkeys, which look as if they had just awakened out of a flour bin. Above, a green down stretches up to bright yellow furze-crofts far aloft. Behind, a reedy marsh, covered with red cattle, paves the valley till it closes in; the steep sides of the hills are clothed in oak and ash covert, in which, three months ago, you could have shot more cocks in one day than you would in Berkshire in a year. Pleasant little glimpses there are, too, of grey stone farm-houses, nestling among sycamore and beech; bright-green meadows, alder-fringed; squares of rich red fallow-field, parted by lines of golden furze; all cut out with a peculiar blackness, and clearness, soft and tender withal, which betokens a climate surcharged with rain. Only, in the very bosom of the valley, a soft mist hangs, increasing the sense of distance, and softening back one hill and wood behind another, till the great brown moor which backs it all seems to rise out of the empty air. For a thousand feet it ranges up, in rude sheets of brown heather, and grey cairns and screes of granite, all sharp and black-edged against the pale blue sky; and all suddenly cut off above by one long horizontal line of dark grey cloud, which seems to hang there motionless, and yet is growing to windward, and dying to leeward, for ever rushing out of the invisible into sight, and into the invisible again, at railroad speed. Out of nothing the moor rises, and into nothing it ascends,—a

great dark phantom between earth and sky, boding rain and howling tempest, and perhaps fearful wreck—for the groundswell moans and thunders on the beach behind us, louder and louder every moment.

Let us go on, and up the street, after we have scrambled through the usual labyrinth of timber-baulks, rusty anchors, boats which have been dragged, for the purpose of mending and tarring, into the very middle of the road, and old spars stowed under walls, in the vain hope that they may be of some use for something some day, and have stood the stares and welcomes of the lazy giants who are sitting about upon them, black-locked, black-bearded, with ruddy, wholesome faces, and eyes as bright as diamonds; men who are on their own ground, and know it; who will not touch their caps to you, or pull the short black pipe from between their lips as you pass, but expect you to prove yourself a gentleman, by speaking respectfully to them; which, if you do, you will find them as hearty, intelligent, brave fellows as ever walked this earth, capable of anything, from working the naval-brigade guns at Sevastopol, down to running up to * * * a hundred miles in a cockleshell lugger, to forestall the early mackarel market. God be with you, my brave lads, and with your children after you; for as long as you are what I have known you, Old England will rule the seas, and many a land beside!

But in going up Aberalva-street, you remark several things; first, that the houses were all whitewashed yesterday, except where the snowy white is picked out by buttresses of pink and blue; next, that they all have bright green palings in front, and bright green window-sills and frames; next, that they are all roofed with shining grey slate, and the space between the window and the pales flagged with the same; next, that where such space is not flagged, it is full of flowers and shrubs which stand the winter only in our greenhouses. The fuchsias are ten feet high, laden with ripe purple berries running over (for there are no birds to pick them off); and there in the front of the coast-guard lieutenant's house, is Cobæa scandens, covered with purple claret-glasses, as it has been ever since Christmas: for Aberalva knows no winter: and there are grown-up men in it who never put on a skate, or made a snow-ball in their lives. A most cleanly, bright-coloured, foreign-looking street, is that long straggling one which runs up the hill towards Penalva Court: only remark, that this cleanliness is gained by making the gutter in the middle street the common sewer of the town, and tread clear of cabbage-leaves, pilchard bones, *et id genus omne*. For Aberalva is like Paris (if the answer of a celebrated sanitary reformer to the emperor be truly reported), "fair without but foul within."

However, the wind is blowing dull and hollow from south-west; the clouds are rolling faster and faster up from the Atlantic; the sky to westward is brassy green; the glass is falling fast; and there will be wind and rain enough to-night to sweep even Aberalva clean for the next week.

Grace Harvey sees the coming storm, as she goes slowly homewards, dismissing her little flock; and she lingers long and sadly outside her cottage door, looking out over the fast blackening sea, and listening to the hollow thunder of the groundswell, against the back of the point which shelters Aberalva Cove.

Far away on the horizon, the masts of stately ships stand out against the sky, driving fast to the eastward with shortened sail. They, too, know what is coming; and Grace prays for them as she stands, in her wild way, with half outspoken words.

"All those gallant ships, dear Lord! and so many beautiful men in them, and so few of them ready to die; and all those gallant soldiers going to the war;—Lord, wilt thou not have mercy? Spare them for a little time before—. Is not that cruel, man-devouring sea full enough, Lord; and brave men's bones enough, strewn up and down all rocks and sands? And is not that dark place full enough, O Lord, of poor souls cut off in a moment, as my two were? Oh, not to-night, dear Lord! Do not call any one to-night—give them a day more, one chance more, poor fellows—they have had so few, and so many temptations, and, perhaps, no schooling. They go to sea so early, and young things will be young things, Lord. Spare them but one night more—and yet He did not spare my two—they had no time to repent, and have no time for ever, evermore!"

And she stands looking out over the sea; but she has lost sight of everything, save her own sad imaginations. Her eyes open wider and wider, as if before some unseen horror; the eyebrows contract upwards; the cheeks sharpen; the mouth parts; the lips draw back, showing the white teeth, as if in intensest agony. Thus she stands long, motionless, awe-frozen, save when a shudder runs through every limb, with such a countenance as that "fair terror" of which Shelley sang—

> "Its horror and its beauty are divine;
> Upon its lips and eyelids seem to lie
> Loveliness like a shadow, from which shine,
> Fiery and lucid, struggling underneath,
> The agonies of anguish and of death."

Her mother comes out from the cottage door behind, and lays her hand upon the girl's shoulder. The spell is broken; and hiding her face in her hands, Grace bursts into violent weeping.

"What are you doing, my poor child, here, in the cold night air?"

"My two, mother, my two!" said she; "and all the poor souls at sea to-night!"

"You mustn't think of it. Haven't I told you not to think of it? One would lose one's wits if one did too often."

"If it is all true, mother, what else is there worth thinking of in heaven or earth?"

And Grace goes in with a dull, heavy look of utter exhaustion, bodily and mental, and quietly sets the things for supper, and goes about her cottage work, as one who bears a heavy chain, but has borne it too long to let it hinder the daily drudgery of life.

Grace had reason to pray at least, for the soldiers who were going to the war. For as she prayed, the Orinoco, Ripon, and Manilla, were steaming down Southampton Water, with the Guards on board; and but that morning little Lord Scoutbush, left behind at the dépôt, had bid farewell to his best friend, opposite Buckingham Palace, while the bearskins were on the bayonet-points, with—

"Well, old fellow, you have the fun, after all, and I the work;" and had been answered with—

"Fun? there will be no fighting; and I shall only have lost my season in town."

Was there, then, no man among them that day, who

> "As the trees began to whisper, and the wind began to roll,
> Heard in the wild March morning the angels call his soul?"

* * * * * *

Verily they are gone down to Hades, even many stalwart souls of heroes.

CHAPTER III.

ANYTHING BUT STILL LIFE.

Penalva Court, about half a mile from the quay, is "like a house in a story;"—a house of seven gables, and those very shaky ones; a house of useless long passages, useless turrets, vast lumber attics where maids see ghosts, lofty garden and yard walls of grey stone, round which the wind and rain are lashing through the dreary darkness; low oak-ribbed ceilings; windows which once were mullioned with stone, but now with wood painted white; walls which were once oak-wainscot, but have been painted like the mullions, to the disgust of Elsley Vavasour, poet, its occupant in March, 1854, who forgot that, while the oak was left dark, no man could have seen to read in the rooms a yard from the window.

He has, however, little reason to complain of the one drawing-room, where he and his wife are sitting, so pleasant has she made it look, in spite of the plainness of the furniture. A bright log-fire is burning on the hearth. There are a few good books too, and a few handsome prints; while some really valuable knick-knacks are set out, with pardonable ostentation, on a little table covered with crimson velvet. It is only cotton velvet, if you look close at it; but the things are pretty enough to catch the eye of all visitors; and Mrs. Heale, the Doctor's wife (who always calls Mrs. Vavasour "my lady," though she does not love her), and Mrs. Trebooze, of Trebooze, always finger them over when they have any opportunity, and whisper to each other, half contemptuously,—"Ah, poor thing! there's a sign that she has seen better days."

And better days, in one sense, Mrs. Vavasour has seen. I am afraid, indeed, that she has more than once regretted the morning when she ran away in a hack-cab from her brother Lord Scoutbush's house in Eaton Square, to be married to Elsley Vavasour, the gifted author of "A Soul's Agonies, and other Poems." He was a lion then, with foolish women running after him, and turning his head once and for all; and Lucia St. Just was a wild Irish girl, new to London society, all feeling and romance, and literally all; for there was little real intellect underlying her passionate sensibility. So when the sensibility burnt itself out, as it generally does; and when children, and the weak health which comes with them, and the cares of a household, and money difficulties were absorbing her little powers, Elsley Vavasour began to fancy that his wife was a very commonplace person, who was fast losing even her good looks and her good temper. So, on the whole, they were not happy. Elsley was an affectionate man, and honourable to a fantastic nicety; but he was vain, capricious, over-sensitive, craving for admiration and distinction; and it was not enough for him that his wife loved him, bore him children, kept his accounts, mended and moiled all day long for him and his; he wanted her to act the public for him exactly when he was hungry for praise; and that not the actual, but an altogether ideal, public; to worship him as a deity, "live for him and him alone," "realize" his poetic dreams of marriage bliss, and talk sentiment with him, or listen to him talking sentiment to her, when she would much sooner be safe in bed burying all the petty cares of the day, and the pain in her back too, poor thing! in sound sleep; and so it befell that they often quarrelled and wrangled, and that they were quarrelling and wrangling this very night.

Who cares to know how it began? Who cares to hear how it went on,—the stupid, aimless skirmish of bitter words, between

two people who had forgotten themselves? I believe it began with Elsley's being vexed at her springing up two or three times, fancying that she heard the children cry, while he wanted to be quiet, and sentimentalize over the roaring of the wind outside. Then—she thought of nothing but those children. Why did she not take a book and occupy her mind? To which she had her pert, though just answer, about her mind having quite enough to do to keep clothes on the children's backs, and so forth,—let who list imagine the miserable little squabble;—till she says,—"I know what has put you out so to-night; nothing but the news of my sister's coming." He answers,—"That her sister is as little to him as to any man; as welcome to come now as she has been to stay away these three years."

"Ah, it's very well to say that; but you have been a different person ever since that letter came." And so she torments him into an angry self-justification (which she takes triumphantly as a confession) that "it is very disagreeable to have his thoughts broken in on by one who has no sympathy with him and his pursuits—and who—" and at that point he wisely stops short, for he was going to throw down a very ugly gage of battle.

Thrown down or not, Lucia snatches at it.

"Ah, I understand; poor Valentia! You always hated her."

"I did not: but she is so brusque, and excited, and—"

"Be so kind as not to abuse my family. You may say what you will of me; but—"

"And what have your family done for me, pray?"

"Why, considering that we are now living rent-free in my brother's house, and—" She stops in her turn; for her pride and her prudence also will not let her tell him that Valentia has been clothing her and the children for the last three years. He is just the man to forbid her on the spot to receive any more presents, and to sacrifice her comfort to his own pride. But what she has said is quite enough to bring out a very angry answer, which she expecting, nips in the bud by—

"For goodness' sake, don't speak so loud; I don't want the servants to hear."

"I am not speaking loud"—(he has not yet opened his lips). "That is your old trick to prevent my defending myself, while you are driving one mad. How dare you taunt me with being a pensioner on your brother's bounty? I'll go up to town again and take lodgings there. I need not be beholden to any aristocrat of them all. I have my own station in the real world,—the world of intellect; I have my own friends; I have made myself a name without his help; and I can live without his help, he shall find!"

"Which name were you speaking of?" rejoins she looking

up at him, with all her native Irish humour flashing up for a moment in her naughty eyes. The next minute she would have given her hand not to have said it; for, with a very terrible word, Elsley springs to his feet and dashes out of the room.

She hears him catch up his hat and cloak, and hurry out into the rain, slamming the door behind him. She springs up to call him back, but he is gone;—and she dashes herself on the floor, and bursts into an agony of weeping over "young bliss never to return"? Not in the least. Her principal fear is, lest he should catch cold in the rain. She takes up her work again, and stitches away in the comfortable certainty that in half an hour she will have recovered her temper, and he also; that they will pass a sulky night; and to-morrow, by about mid-day, without explanation or formal reconciliation, have become as good friends as ever. "Perhaps," says she to herself, with a woman's sense of power, "if he be very much ashamed and very wet, I'll pity him and make friends to-night."

Miserable enough are these little squabbles. Why will two people, who have sworn to love and cherish each other utterly, and who, on the whole, do what they have sworn, behave to each other as they dare for very shame behave to no one else? Is it that, as every beautiful thing has its hideous antitype, this mutual shamelessness is the devil's ape of mutual confidence? Perhaps it cannot be otherwise with beings compact of good and evil. When the veil of reserve is withdrawn from between two souls, it must be withdrawn for evil, as for good, till the two natures, which ought to seek rest, each in the other's inmost depths, may at last spring apart, confronting each other recklessly with,—"There, you see me as I am; you know the worst of me, and I of you; take me as you find me—what care I?"

Elsley and Lucia have not yet arrived at that terrible crisis; though they are on the path toward it,—the path of little carelessnesses, rudenesses, ungoverned words and tempers, and, worst of all, of that half-confidence, which is certain to avenge itself by irritation and quarrelling; for if two married people will not tell each other in love what they ought, they will be sure to tell each other in anger what they ought not. It is plain enough already that Elsley has his weak point, which must not be touched; something about "a name," which Lucia is to be expected to ignore,—as if anything which really exists could be ignored while two people live together night and day, for better for worse. Till the thorn is out, the wound will not heal; and till the matter (whatever it may be) is set right, by confession and absolution, there will be no peace for them, for they are living in a lie; and, unless it be a very little one indeed, better, perhaps, that they should go on to that terrible crisis of open defiance.

It may end in disgust, hatred, madness; but it may, too, end in each falling again upon the other's bosom, and sobbing out through holy tears,—"Yes, you do know the worst of me, and yet you love me still. This is happiness, to find oneself most loved when one most hates oneself! God, help us to confess our sins to Thee, as we have done to each other, and to begin life again like little children, struggling hand in hand out of this lowest pit, up the steep path which leads to life, and strength, and peace."

Heaven grant that it may so end! But now Elsley has gone raging out into the raging darkness; trying to prove himself to himself the most injured of men, and to hate his wife as much as possible: though the fool knows the whole time that he loves her better than anything on earth, even than that "fame," on which he tries to fatten his lean soul, snapping greedily at every scrap which falls in his way, and, in default, snapping at everybody and everything else. And little comfort it gives him. Why should it? What comfort, save in being wise and strong? And is he the wiser or stronger for being told by a reviewer that he has written fine words, or has failed in writing them; or to have silly women writing to ask for his autograph, or for leave to set his songs to music? Nay,—shocking as the question may seem,—is he the wiser and stronger man for being a poet at all, and a genius?—provided, of course, that the word genius is used in its modern meaning, of a person who can say prettier things than his neighbours. I think not. Be it as it may, away goes the poor genius; his long cloak, picturesque enough in calm weather, fluttering about uncomfortably enough, while the rain washes his long curls into swabs; out through the old garden, between storm-swept laurels, beneath dark groaning pines, and through a door in the wall which opens into the lane.

The lane leads downward, on the right, into the village. He is in no temper to meet his fellow-creatures,—even to see the comfortable gleam through their windows, as the sailors cose round the fire with wife and child; so he turns to the left, up the deep stone-banked lane, which leads towards the cliff, dark now as pitch, for it is overhung, right and left, with deep oak-wood.

It is no easy matter to proceed, though, for the wind pours down the lane as through a funnel, and the road is of slippery bare slate, worn here and there into puddles of greasy clay, and Elsley slips back half of every step, while his wrath, as he tires, oozes out of his heels. Moreover, those dark trees above him, tossing their heads impatiently against the scarcely less dark sky, strike an awe into him,—a sense of loneliness, almost of fear. An uncanny, bad night it is; and he is out on a bad

errand; and he knows it, and wishes that he were home again. He does not believe, of course, in those "spirits of the storm," about whom he has so often written, any more than he does in a great deal of his fine imagery; but still, in such characters as his, the sympathy between the moods of nature and those of the mind is most real and important; and Dame Nature's equinoctial night-wrath is weird, grewsome, crushing, and can be faced (if it must be faced) in real comfort only when one is going on an errand of mercy, with a clear conscience, a light heart, a good cigar, and plenty of Mackintosh.

So, ere Elsley had gone a quarter of a mile, he turned back, and resolved to go in, and take up his book once more. Perhaps Lucia might beg his pardon; and if not, why, perhaps he might beg hers. The rain was washing the spirit out of him, as it does out of a thin-coated horse.

Stay! What was that sound above the roar of the gale? a cannon?

He listened, turning his head right and left to escape the howling of the wind in his ears. A minute, and another boom rose and rang aloft. It was near, too. He almost fancied that he felt the concussion of the air.

Another, and another; and then, in the village below, he could see lights hurrying to and fro. A wreck at sea? He turned again up the lane. He had never seen a wreck. What an opportunity for a poet; and on such a night too: it would be magnificent if the moon would but come out! Just the scene, too, for his excited temper! He will work on upward, let it blow and rain as it may. He is not disappointed. Ere he has gone a hundred yards, a mass of dripping oil-skins runs full butt against him, knocking him against the bank; and, by the clank of weapons, he recognises the coast-guard watchman.

"Hillo!—who's that? Beg your pardon, Sir," as the man recognises Elsley's voice.

"What is it?—what are the guns?"

"God knows, Sir! Overright the Chough and Crow; on 'em, I'm afeard. There they go again!—hard up, poor souls! God help them!" and the man runs shouting down the lane.

Another gun, and another; but long ere Elsley reaches the cliff, they are silent; and nothing is to be heard but the noise of the storm, which, loud as it was below among the wood, is almost intolerable now that he is on the open down.

He struggles up the lane toward the cliff, and there pauses, gasping, under the shelter of a wall, trying to analyse that enormous mass of sound which fills his ears and brain, and flows through his heart like maddening wine. He can bear the sight of the dead grass on the cliff-edge, weary, feeble, expostulating

with its old tormentor the gale; then the fierce screams of the blasts as they rush up across the layers of rock below, like hounds leaping up at their prey; and far beneath, the horrible confused battle-roar of that great leaguer of waves. He cannot see them, as he strains his eyes over the wall into the blank depth,—nothing but a confused welter and quiver of mingled air, and rain, and spray, as if the very atmosphere were writhing in the clutches of the gale: but he can hear,—what can he not hear? It would have needed a less vivid brain than Elsley's to fancy another Badajos beneath. There it all is:—the rush of columns to the breach, officers cheering them on,—pauses, breaks, wild retreats, upbraiding calls, whispering consultations,—fresh rush on rush, now here, now there,—fierce shouts above, below, behind, —shrieks of agony, choked groans and gasps of dying men, —scaling-ladders hurled down with all their rattling freight,—dull mine-explosions, ringing cannon-thunder, as the old fortress blasts back its besiegers pell-mell into the deep. It is all there: truly enough there, at least, to madden yet more Elsley's wild angry brain, till he tries to add his shouts to the great battle-cries of land and sea, and finds them as little audible as an infant's wail.

Suddenly, far below him, a bright glimmer;—and, in a moment, a blue-light reveals the whole scene, in ghastly hues,—blue leaping breakers, blue weltering sheets of foam, blue rocks, crowded with blue figures, like ghosts, flitting to and fro upon the brink of that blue seething Phlegethon, and rushing up towards him through the air, a thousand flying blue foam-sponges, which dive over the brow of the hill and vanish, like delicate fairies fleeing before the wrath of the gale:—but where is the wreck? The blue-light cannot pierce the grey veil of mingled mist and spray which hangs to seaward; and her guns have been silent for half an hour and more.

Elsley hurries down, and finds half the village collected on the long sloping point of down below. Sailors wrapped in pilot-cloth, oil-skinned coast-guardsmen, women with their gowns turned over their heads, staggering restlessly up and down, and in and out, while every moment some fresh comer stumbles down the slope, thrusting himself into his clothes as he goes, and asks, "Where's the wreck!" and gets no answer, but a surly advice to "hold his noise," as if they had hope of hearing the wreck which they cannot see; and kind women, with their hearts full of mothers' instincts, declare that they can hear little children crying, and are pooh-poohed down by kind men, who, man's fashion, don't like to believe anything too painful, or, if they believe it, to talk of it.

"What were the guns from, then, Brown? asks the Lieutenant of the head-boatman.

"Off the Chough and Crow, I thought, Sir. God grant not!"

"You thought, Sir!" says the great man, willing to vent his vexation on some one. "Why didn't you make sure?"

"Why, just look, Lieutenant," says Brown, pointing into the "blank height of the dark;" "and I was on the pier too, and couldn't see; but the look-out man here says—" A shift of wind, a drift of cloud, and the moon flashes out a moment.—"There she is, Sir!"

Some three hundred yards out at sea lies a long curved black line, beautiful, severe, and still, amid those white wild leaping hills. A murmur from the crowd, which swells into a roar, as they surge aimlessly up and down.

Another moment, and it is cut in two by a white line—covered—lost—all hold their breaths. No; the sea passes on, and still the black curve is there; enduring.

"A terrible big ship!"

"A Liverpool clipper, by the lines of her."

"God help the poor passengers, then!" sobs a woman. "They're past our help: she's on her beam ends."

"And her deck upright toward us."

"Silence! Out of the way you loafing long-shores!" shouts the Lieutenant. "Brown—the rockets!"

What though the Lieutenant be somewhat given to strong liquors, and stronger language? He wears the Queen's uniform; and what is more, he knows his work, and can do it; all make a silent ring while the fork is planted; the Lieutenant, throwing away the end of his cigar, kneels and adjusts the stick; Brown and his mates examine and shake out the coils of line.

Another minute, and the magnificent creature rushes forth with a triumphant roar, and soars aloft over the waves in a long stream of fire, defiant of the gale.

Is it over her? No! A fierce gust, which all but hurls the spectators to the ground; the fiery stream sweeps away to the left, in a grand curve of sparks, and drops into the sea.

"Try it again!" shouts the Lieutenant, his blood now up. "We'll see which will beat, wind or powder."

Again a rocket is fixed, with more allowance for the wind; but the black curve has disappeared, and he must wait awhile.

"There it is again! Fly swift and sure," cries Elsley, "thou fiery angel of mercy, bearing the saviour-line! It may not be too late yet."

Full and true the rocket went across her; and "three cheers for the Lieutenant!" rose above the storm.

"Silence, lads! Not so bad, though;" says he, rubbing his wet hands. "Hold on by the line, and watch for a bite, Brown."

Five minutes pass. Brown has the line in his hand, waiting for any signal touch from the ship: but the line sways limp in the surge.

Ten minutes. The Lieutenant lights a fresh cigar, and paces up and down, smoking fiercely.

A quarter of an hour; and yet no response. The moon is shining clearly now. They can see her hatchways, the stumps of her masts, great tangles of rigging swaying and lashing down across her deck; but that delicate upper curve is becoming more ragged after every wave; and the tide is rising fast.

"There's a pull!" shouts Brown. . . . "No, there ain't! . . . God have mercy, Sir! She's going!"

The black curve boils up, as if a mine had been sprung on board, leaps into arches, jagged peaks, black bars crossed and tangled; and then all melts away into the white seething waste; while the line floats home helplessly, as if disappointed; and the billows plunge more sullenly and sadly towards the shore, as if in remorse for their dark and reckless deed.

All is over. What shall we do now? Go home, and pray that God may have mercy on all drowning souls? Or think what a picturesque and tragical scene it was, and what a beautiful poem it will make, when we have thrown it into an artistic form, and bedizened it with conceits and analogies stolen from all heaven and earth by our own self-willed fancy?

Elsley Vavasour—through whose spectacles, rather than with my own eyes, I have been looking at the wreck, and to whose account, not to mine, the metaphors and similes of the last two pages must be laid—took the latter course; not that he was not awed, calmed, and even humbled, as he felt how poor and petty his own troubles were, compared with that great tragedy: but in his fatal habit of considering all matters in heaven and earth as bricks and mortar for the poet to build with, he considered that he had "seen enough;" as if men were sent into the world to see, and not to act; and going home too excited to sleep, much more to go and kiss forgiveness to his sleeping wife, sat up all night, writing "The Wreck," which may be (as the reviewer in "The Parthenon" asserts) an exquisite poem; but I cannot say that it is of much importance.

So the delicate genius sate that night, scribbling verses by a warm fire, and the rough Lieutenant settled himself down in his Mackintoshes, to sit out those weary hours on the bare rock, having done all that he could do, and yet knowing that his duty was, not to leave the place as long as there was a chance of saving—not a life, for that was past all hope—but a chest of clothes, or a stick of timber. There he settled himself, grumbling, yet faithful; and filled up the time with sleepy maledic-

tions against some old admiral, who had—or had not—taken a spite to him in the West Indies thirty years before, else he would have been a post captain by now, comfortably in bed on board a crack frigate, instead of sitting all night out on a rock, like an old cormorant, &c. &c. Who knows not the woes of ancient coast-guard Lieutenants?

But as it befell, Elsley Vavasour was justly punished for going home, by losing the most "poetical" incident of the whole night.

For with the coast-guardsmen many sailors stayed. There was nothing to be earned by staying: but still, who knew but they might be wanted? And they hung on with the same feeling which tempts one to linger round a grave ere the earth is filled in, loth to give up the last sight, and with it the last hope. The ship herself, over and above her lost crew, was in their eyes a person to be loved and regretted. And Gentleman Jan spoke, like a true sailor—

"Ah, poor dear! And she such a beauty, Mr. Brown; as any one might see by her lines, even that way off. Ah, poor dear!"

"And so many brave souls on board; and, perhaps, some of them not ready, Mr. Beer," says the serious elderly chief boatman. "Eh, Captain Willis?"

"The Lord has had mercy on them, I don't doubt," answers the old man, in his quiet sweet voice. "One can't but hope that He would give them time for one prayer before all was over; and having been drowned myself, Mr. Brown, three times, and taken up for dead—that is, once in Gibraltar bay, and once when I was a total wreck in the old Seahorse, that was in the hurricane in the Indies; after that, when I fell over quay-head here, fishing for bass,—why, I know well how quick the prayer will run through a man's heart, when he's a-drowning, and the light of conscience, too, all one's life in one minute, like—"

"It arn't the men I care for," says Gentleman Jan; "they're gone to heaven, like all brave sailors do as dies by wreck and battle: but the poor dear ship, d'ye see, Captain Willis, she ha'n't no heaven to go to, and that's why I feel for her so."

Both the old men shake their heads at Jan's doctrine, and turn the subject off.

"You'd better go home, Captain, 'fear of the rheumatics. It's a rough night for your years; and you've no call, like me."

"I would, but my maid there; and I can't get her home; and I can't leave her." And Willis points to the schoolmistress, who sits upon the flat slope of rock, a little apart from the rest, with her face resting on her hands, gazing intently out into the wild waste.

"Make her go; it's her duty—we all have our duties. Why

does her mother let her out at this time of night? I keep my maids tighter than that, I warrant." And disciplinarian Mr. Brown makes a step towards her.

"Ah, Mr. Brown, don't now! She's not one of us. There's no saying what's going on there in her. May-be she's praying may-be she sees more than we do, over the sea there."

"What do you mean? There's no living body in those breakers, be sure!"

"There's more living things about on such a night than have bodies to them, or than any but such as she can see. If any one ever talked with angels, that maid does; and I've heard her, too; I can say I have—certain of it. Those that like may call her an innocent: but I wish I were such an innocent, Mr. Brown. I'd be nearer heaven then, here on earth, than I fear sometimes I ever shall be, even after I'm dead and gone."

"Well, she's a good girl, mazed or not; but look at her now! What's she after?"

The girl had raised her head, and was pointing, with one arm stretched stiffly out, toward the sea.

Old Willis went down to her, and touched her gently on the shoulder.

"Come home, my maid, then, you'll take cold, indeed;" but she did not move or lower her arm.

The old man, accustomed to her fits of fixed melancholy, looked down under her bonnet, to see whether she was "past," as he called it. By the moonlight he could see her great eyes steady and wide open. She motioned him away, half impatiently, and then sprang to her feet with a scream.

"A man! A man! Save him!"

As she spoke, a huge wave rolled in, and shot up the sloping end of the point in a broad sheet of foam. And out of it struggled, on hands and knees, a human figure. He looked wildly up, and round, and then his head dropped again on his breast; and he lay clinging with outspread arms, like Homer's polypus in the Odyssey, as the wave drained back, in a thousand roaring cataracts, over the edge of the rock.

"Save him!" shrieked she again, as twenty men rushed forward —and stopped short. The man was fully thirty yards from them: but close to him, between them and him, stretched a long ghastly crack, some ten feet wide, cutting the point across. All knew it: its slippery edge, its polished upright sides, the seething cauldrons within it; and knew, too, that the next wave would boil up from it in a hundred jets, and suck in the strongest to his doom, to fall, with brains dashed out, into a chasm from which was no return.

Ere they could nerve themselves for action, the wave had come. Up the slope it went, one half of it burying the wretched mariner,

and fell over into the chasm. The other half rushed up the chasm itself, and spouted forth again to the moonlight in columns of snow, in time to meet the wave from which it had just parted, as it fell from above; and then the two boiled up, and round, and over, and swirled along the smooth rock to their very feet.

The schoolmistress took one long look; and as the wave retired, rushed after it to the very brink of the chasm, and flung herself on her knees.

"She's mazed!"

"No, she's not!" almost screamed old Willis, in mingled pride and terror, as he rushed after her. "The wave has carried him across the crack and she's got him!" And he sprang upon her, and caught her round the waist.

"Now, if you be men!" shouted he, as the rest hurried down.

"Now, if you be men; before the next wave comes!" shouted Big Jan. "Hands together, and make a line!" And he took a grip with one hand of the old man's waistband, and held out the other for who would to seize.

Who took it? Frank Headley, the curate, who had been watching all sadly apart, longing to do something which no one could mistake.

"Be you man enough?" asked big Jan doubtfully.

"Try," said Frank.

"Really, you ben't, Sir," said Jan, civilly enough. "Means no offence, Sir; your heart's stout enough, I see; but you don't know what it'll be." And he caught the hand of a huge fellow next him, while Frank shrank sadly back into the darkness.

Strong hand after hand was clasped, and strong knee after knee dropped almost to the rock, to meet the coming rush of water; and all who knew their business took a long breath,—they might have need of one.

It came, and surged over the man, and the girl, and up to old Willis's throat, and round the knees of Jan and his neighbour; and then followed the returning out-draught, and every limb quivered with the strain: but when the cataract had disappeared, the chain was still unbroken.

"Saved!" and a cheer broke from all lips, save those of the girl herself; she was as senseless as he whom she had saved. They hurried her and him up the rock ere another wave could come; but they had much ado to open her hands, so firmly clenched together were they round his waist.

Gently they lifted each, and laid them on the rock: while old Willis, having recovered his breath, set to work crying like a child, to restore breath to "his maiden."

"Run for Dr. Heale, some good Christian!" But Frank, longing to escape from a company who did not love him, and to

be of some use ere the night was out, was already half-way to the village on that very errand.

However, ere the Doctor could be stirred out of his boozy slumbers, and thrust into his clothes by his wife, the schoolmistress was safe in bed at her mother's house; and the man, weak, but alive, carried triumphantly up to Heale's door; which having been kicked open, the sailors insisted in carrying him right upstairs, and depositing him on the best spare bed.

"If you won't come to your patients, Doctor, your patients shall come to you. Why were you asleep in your liquors, instead of looking out for poor wratches, like a Christian? You see whether his bones be broke, and gi'un his medicines proper; and then go and see after the schoolmistress; she'm worth a dozen of any man, and a thousand of you! We'll pay for 'un like men; and if you don't, we'll break every bottle in your shop."

To which, what between bodily fear and real good-nature, old Heale assented; and so ended that eventful night.

CHAPTER IV.

FLOTSOM, JETSOM, AND LAGEND.

About nine o'clock the next morning, Gentleman Jan strolled into Dr. Heale's surgery, pipe in mouth, with an attendant satellite; for every lion, poor as well as rich,—in country as in town, must needs have his jackal.

Heale's surgery—or, in plain English, shop—was a doleful hole enough; in such dirt and confusion as might be expected from a drunken occupant, with a practice which was only not decaying because there was no rival in the field. But monopoly made the old man, as it makes most men, all the more lazy and careless; and there was not a drug on his shelves which could be warranted to work the effect set forth in that sanguine and too trustful book, the Pharmacopœia, which, like Mr. Pecksniff's England, expects every man to do his duty, and is, accordingly (as the Lancet and Dr. Letheby know too well), grievously disappointed.

In this kennel of evil savours, Heale was slowly trying to poke things into something like order; and dragging out a few old drugs with a shaky hand, to see if any one would buy them, in a vague expectation that something must needs have happened

to somebody the night before, which would require somewhat of his art.

And he was not disappointed. Gentleman Jan, without taking his pipe out of his mouth, dropped his huge elbows on the counter, and his black-fringed chin on his fists; took a look round the shop, as if to find something which would suit him; and then—

"I say, Doctor, gi's some tackleum."

"Some diachylum plaster, Mr. Beer?" says Heale, meekly, "What for, then?"

"To tackle my shins. I barked 'em cruel against King Arthur's nose last night. Hard in the bone he is;—wish I was as hard."

"How much diachylum will you want, then, Mr. Beer?"

"Well, I don't know. Let's see!" and Jan pulls up his blue trousers, and pulls down his grey rig and furrows, and considers his broad and shaggy shins.

"Matter of four pennies broad; two to each leg;" and then replaces his elbows, and smokes on.

"I say, Doctor, that 'ere curate come out well last night. I shall go to church next Sunday."

"What," asks the satellite, "after you upset he that fashion yesterday?"

"I don't care what you thinks;" says Jan, who, of course, bullies his jackal, like most lions: "but I goes to church. He's a good 'un, say I,—little and good, like a Welshman's cow; and clapped me on the back when we'd got the man and the maid safe, and says,—'Well done our side, old fellow!' and stands something hot all round, what's more, in at the Mariner's Rest. —I say, Doctor, where's he as we hauled ashore? I'll go up and see 'un."

"Not now, then, Mr. Beer; not now, then. He's sleeping, indeed he is, like any child."

"So much the better. We wain't be bothered with his hollering. But go up I will. Do ye let me now; I'll be as still as a maid."

And Jan kicked off his shoes, and marched on tiptoe through the shop, while Dr. Heale, moaning professional ejaculations, showed him the way.

The shipwrecked man was sleeping sweetly; and little was to be seen of his face, so covered was it with dark tangled curls and thick beard.

"Ah! a 'Stralian digger, by the beard of him, and his red jersey," whispered Jan, as he bent tenderly over the poor fellow, and put his head on one side to listen to his breathing. "Beautiful he sleeps, to be sure!" said Jan; "and a tidy-looking chap,

too. 'Tis a pity to wake 'un, poor wratch; and he, perhaps, with a sweetheart aboard, and drownded; or else all his kit lost.—Let 'un sleep so long as he can: he'll find all out soon enough, God help him!

And big Jan stole down the stairs gently and reverently, like a true sailor; and took his diachylum, and went off to plaster his shins.

About ten minutes afterwards, Heale was made aware that his guest was awake, by sundry grunts and ejaculations, which ended in a series of long and doleful whistles, and then broke out into a song. So he went up, and found the stranger sitting upright in bed, combing his curls with his fingers, and chaunting unto himself a cheerful ditty.

"Good morning, Doctor," quoth he, as his host entered. "Very kind of you, this. Hope I havn't turned a better man than myself out of his bed."

"Delighted to see you so well. Very near drowned, though. We were pumping at your lungs for a full half hour."

"Ah? nothing, though, for an experienced professional man like you!"

"Hum! speaks well for your discrimination," says Heale, flattered. "Very well-spoken young person, though his beard is a bit wild.—How did you know, then, that I was a doctor?"

"By the reverend looks of you, Sir. Besides, I smelt the rhubarb and senna all the way up-stairs, and knew that I'd fallen among professional brethren:—

'Oh, then this valiant mariner,
Which sailed across the sea,
He came home to his own sweetheart,
With his heart so full of glee;

With his heart so full of glee, Sir,
And his pockets full of gold,
And his bag of drugget, with many a nugget,
As heavy as he could hold.'

Don't you wish yours was, Doctor?"

"Eh, eh, eh," sniggered Heale.

"Mine was last night. Now, Doctor, let's have a glass of brandy-and-water, hot with, and an hour's more sleep; and then kick me out, and into the workhouse. Was anybody else saved from the wreck last night?"

"Nobody, Sir," said Heale; and said "Sir," because, in spite of the stranger's rough looks, his accent,—or rather, his no-accent,—showed him that he had fallen in with a very different, and probably a very superior stamp of man to himself; in the

light of which conviction (and being withal a good-natured old soul), he went down and mixed him a stiff glass of brandy-and-water, answering his wife's remonstrances by,—

"The party up-stairs is a bit of a frantic party, certainly; but he is certainly a very superior party, and has the true gentleman about him, any one can see. Besides, he's shipwrecked, as you and I may be any day; and what's like brandy-and-water?"

"I should like to know when I'm like to be shipwrecked, or you either;" says Mrs. Heale, in a tone slightly savouring of indignation and contempt. "You think of nothing but brandy-and-water." But she let the doctor take the glass upstairs, nevertheless.

A few minutes afterwards, Frank came in, and inquired for the shipwrecked man.

"Well enough in body, Sir; and rather requires your skill than mine," said the old time-server. "Won't you walk up?"

So up Frank was shown.

The stranger was sitting up in bed. "Capital, your brandy is, Doctor.—Ah, Sir," seeing Frank, "it is very kind of you, I am sure, to call on me! I presume you are the clergyman?"

But before Frank could answer, Heale had broken forth into loud praises of him, setting forth how the stranger owed his life entirely to his superhuman strength and courage.

"'Pon my word, Sir," said the stranger,—looking them both over and over, through and through, as if to settle how much of all this he was to believe,—"I am deeply indebted to you for your gallantry. I only wish it had been employed on a better subject."

"My good Sir," said Frank, blushing, "you owe your life not to me. I would have helped if I could; but was not thought worthy by our sons of Anak here. Your actual preserver was a young girl."

And Frank told him the story.

"Whew! I hope she won't expect me to marry her as payment.—Handsome?"

"Beautiful," said Frank.

"Money?"

"The village schoolmistress."

"Clever?"

"A sort of half-baked body," said Heale.

"A very puzzling intellect," said Frank.

"Ah—well—that's a fair excuse for declining the honour. I can't be expected to marry a frantic party, as you called me down stairs just now, Doctor."

'I, Sir?"

"Yes, I heard; no offence, though, my good Sir,—but I've the ears of a fox. I hope really, though, that she is none the worse for her heroic flights."

"How is she this morning, Mr. Heale?"

"Well—poor thing, a little light-headed last night: but kindly when I went in last."

"Whew! I hope she has not fallen in love with me. She may fancy me her property—a private waif and stray. Better send for the Coast-guard officer, and let him claim me as belonging to the Admiralty, as flotsom, jetsom, and lagend; for I was all three last night."

"You were, indeed, Sir," said Frank, who began to be a little tired of this levity; "and very thankful to Heaven you ought to be."

Frank spake this in a somewhat professional tone of voice; at which the stranger arched his eyebrows, screwed his lips up, and laid his ears back, like a horse when he meditates a kick.

"You must be better acquainted with my affairs than I am, my dear Sir, if you are able to state that fact.—Doctor! I hear a patient coming into the surgery."

"Extraordinary power of hearing, to be sure," said Heale, toddling down stairs, while the stranger went on, looking Frank full in the face.

"Now that old fogy's gone down stairs, my dear Sir, let us come to an understanding at the beginning of our acquaintance. Of course, you're bound by your cloth to say that sort of thing to me, just as I am bound by it not to swear in your company: but you'll allow me to remark, that it would be rather trying even to your faith, if you were to be thrown ashore with nothing in the world but an old jersey and a bag of tobacco, two hundred miles short of the port where you hoped to land with fifteen hundred well-earned pounds in your pocket."

"My dear Sir," said Frank, after a pause, "whatsoever comes from our Father's hand must be meant in love. 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away.'"

A quaint wince passed over the stranger's face.

"Father, Sir? That fifteen hundred pounds was going to my father's hand, from whosesoever hand it came, or the loss of it. And now what is to become of the poor old man, that hussy Dame Fortune only knows—if she knows her own mind an hour together, which I very much doubt. I worked early and late for that money, Sir; up to my knees in mud and water. Let it be enough for your lofty demands on poor humanity, that I take my loss like a man, with a whistle and a laugh, instead of howling and cursing over it like a baboon. Let's talk of something else; and lend me five pounds, and a suit of clothes

I shan't run away with them, for as I've been thrown ashore here, here I shall stay."

Frank almost laughed at the free and easy request, though he felt at once pained by the man's irreligion, and abashed by his Stoicism;—would he have behaved even as well in such a case?

"I have not five pounds in the world."

"Good! we shall understand each other better."

"But the suit of clothes you shall have at once."

"Good again! Let it be your oldest; for I must do a little rock-scrambling here, for purposes of my own."

So off went Frank to fetch the clothes, puzzling over his new parishioner. The man was not altogether well bred, either in voice or manner; but there was an ease, a confidence, a sense of power, which made Frank feel that he had fallen in with a very strong nature; and one which had seen many men, and many lands, and profited by what it had seen.

When he returned, he found the stranger busy at his ablutions, and gradually appearing as a somewhat dapper, handsome fellow, with a bright grey eye, a short nose, a firm, small mouth, a broad and upright forehead, across the left side of which ran a fearful scar.

"That's a shrewd mark," said he, as he caught Frank's eye fixed on it, while he sat coolly arranging himself on the bedside. "I got it in fair fight, though, by a Crow's tomahawk in the Rocky Mountains. And here's another token (lifting up his black curls), which a Greek robber gave me in the Morea. I've another under my head, for which I have to thank a Tartar, and one or two more little remembrances of flood and field up and down me. Perhaps they may explain to you why I take life and death so coolly. I've looked too often at the little razor-bridge which parts them, to care much for either. Now, don't let me trouble you any longer. You have your flock to see to, I don't doubt. You'll find me at church on Sunday. I always do at Rome as Rome does."

"Then you will stay away," said Frank, with a sad smile.

"Ah? No. Church is respectable and aristocratic; and there one don't get sent to a place unmentionable, ten times an hour, by some inspired tinker. Beside, country people like the Doctor to go to church with their betters; and the very fellows who go to the Methodist meeting themselves would think it *infra dig.* in me to walk in there. Now, good-bye—though I haven't introduced myself—not knowing the name of my kind preserver."

"My name is Frank Headley, Curate of the Parish," said Frank, smiling: though he saw the man was rattling on for the purpose of preventing his talking on serious matters.

"And mine is Tom Thurnall, F.R.C.S., Licentiate of the Universities of Paris, Glasgow, and whilome surgeon of the good clipper Hesperus, which you saw wrecked last night. So, farewell!"

"Come over with me, and have some breakfast."

"No, thanks; you'll be busy. I'll screw some out of old bottles here."

"And now," said Tom Thurnall to himself, as Frank left the room, "to begin life again with an old pen-knife and a pound of honeydew. I wonder which of them got my girdle. I'll stick here till I find out that one thing, and stop the notes by to-day's post if I can but recollect them all;—if I could but stop the nugget, too!"

So saying, he walked down into the surgery, and looked round. Everything was in confusion. Cobwebs were over the bottles, and armies of mites played at bo-peep behind them. He tried a few drawers, and found that they stuck fast; and when he at last opened one, its contents were two old dried-up horse-balls, and a dirty tobacco-pipe. He took down a jar marked Epsom salts, and found it full of Welsh snuff; the next, which was labelled cinnamon, contained blue vitriol. The spatula and pill-roller were crusted with deposits of every hue. The pill-box drawer had not a dozen whole boxes in it; and the counter was a quarter of an inch deep in deposit of every vegetable and mineral matter, including ends of string, tobacco ashes, and broken glass.

Tom took up a dirty duster, and set to work coolly to clear up, whistling away so merrily that he brought in Heale.

"I'm doing a little in the way of business, you see."

"Then you really are a professional practitioner, Sir, as Mr. Headley informs me: though, of course, I don't doubt the fact?" said Heale, summoning up all the little courage he had, to ask the question with.

"F.R.C.S. London, Paris, and Glasgow. Easy enough to write and ascertain the fact. Have been medical officer to a poor-law union, and to a Brazilian man-of-war. Have seen three choleras, two army fevers, and yellow-jack without end. Have doctored gunshot wounds in the two Texan wars, in one Paris revolution, and in the Schleswig-Holstein row; beside accident practice in every country from California to China, and round the world and back again. There's a fine nest of Mr. Weekes's friend (if not creation), Acarus Horridus," and Tom went on dusting and arranging.

Heale had been fairly taken aback by the imposing list of acquirements, and looked at his guest awhile with considerable awe: suddenly a suspicion flashed across him, which caused him (not unseen by Tom) a start and a look of self-congratulatory

wisdom. He next darted out of the shop, and returned as rapidly, rather redder about the eyes, and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand.

"But, Sir, though, though"—began he—"but, of course you will allow me, being a stranger—and as a man of business—all I have to say is, if—that is to say—"

"You want to know why, if I've had all these good businesses, why I haven't kept them?"

"Ex—actly," stammered Heale, much relieved.

"A very sensible and business-like question: but you needn't have been so delicate about asking it as to want a screw before beginning."

"Ah, you're a wag, Sir," keckled the old man.

"I'll tell you frankly; I have an old father, Sir,—a gentleman, and a scholar, and a man of science; once in as good a country practice as man could have, till, God help him, he went blind, Sir—and I had to keep him, and have still. I went over the world to make my fortune, and never made it; and sent him home what I did make, and little enough too. At last, in my despair, I went to the diggings, and had a pretty haul—I needn't say how much. That matters little now; for I suppose it's at the bottom of the sea. There's my story, Sir, and a poor one enough it is,—for the dear old man, at least." And Tom's voice trembled so as he told it, that old Heale believed every word, and, what is more, being—like most hard drinkers—not "unused to the melting mood," wiped his eyes fervently, and went off for another drop of comfort; while Tom dusted and arranged on, till the shop began to look quite smart and business-like.

"Now, Sir!"—when the old man came back—"business is business, and beggars must not be choosers. I don't want to meddle with your practice; I know the rules of the profession: but if you'll let me sit here, and mix your medicines for you, you'll have the more time to visit your patients, that's clear,"—and, perhaps (thought he), to drink your brandy-and-water,—"and when any of them are poisoned by me, it will be time to kick me out. All I ask is, bed and board. Don't be frightened for your spirit-bottle—I can drink water; I've done it many a time, for a week together, in the prairies, and been thankful for a half-pint in the day."

"But, Sir, your dignity as a—"

"Fiddlesticks for dignity; I must live, Sir. Only lend me a couple of sheets of paper and two queen's heads, that I may tell my friends my whereabouts,—and go and talk it over with Mrs. Heale. We must never act without consulting the ladies."

That day Tom sent off the following epist[illegible]

LIBRARY UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

'*To* CHARLES SHUTER, Esq., M.D., *St. Mumpsimus's Hospital, London.*

"DEAR CHARLEY,—

'I do adjure thee, by old pleasant days,
Quartier Latin, and neatly-shod grisettes,
By all our wanderings in quaint by-ways,
By ancient frolics, and by ancient debts,'

"Go to the United Bank of Australia forthwith, and stop the notes whose numbers—all, alas! which I can recollect—are enclosed. Next, lend me five pounds. Next, send me down, as quick as possible, five pounds' worth of decent drugs, as per list; and—if you can borrow me one—a tolerable microscope, and a few natural history books, to astound the yokels here with: for I was shipwrecked here last night, after all, at a dirty little west-country port, and what's worse, robbed of all I had made at the diggings, and start fair, once more, to run against cruel Dame Fortune, as Colson did against the Indians, without a shirt to my back. Don't be a hospitable fellow, and ask me to come up and camp with you. Mumpsimus's and all old faces would be a great temptation: but here I must stick till I hear of my money, and physic the natives for my daily bread."

To his father he wrote thus, not having the heart to tell the truth:—

"*To* EDWARD THURNALL, Esq., M.D., *Whitbury.*

MY DEAREST OLD FATHER,—I hope to see you again in a few weeks, as soon as I have settled a little business here, where I have found a capital opening for a medical man. Meanwhile let Mark or Mary write and tell me how you are—and for sending you every penny I can spare, trust me. I have not had all the luck I expected; but am as hearty as a bull, and as merry as a cricket, and fall on my legs, as of old, like a cat. I long to come to you; but I mustn't yet. It is near three years since I had a sight of that blessed white head, which is the only thing I care for under the sun, except Mark and little Mary—big Mary I suppose she is now, and engaged to be married to some 'bloated aristocrat.' Best remembrances to old Mark Armsworth.

"Your affectionate son,

"T. T."

"Mr. Heale," said Tom next, "are we Whigs or Tories here?"

"Why—ahem, Sir, my Lord Scoutbush, who owns most hereabouts, and my Lord Minchampstead, who has bought Carcarrow

moors above,—very old Whig connexions, both of them; but Mr. Trebooze, of Trebooze, he, again, thorough-going Tory—very good patient he was once, and may be again—ha! ha! Gay young man, Sir—careless of his health; so you see as a medical man, Sir—"

"Which is the liberal paper? This one? Very good.' And Tom wrote off to the liberal paper that evening a letter, which bore fruit ere the week's end, in the shape of five columns, headed thus :—

WRECK OF THE "HESPERUS."

"The following detailed account of this lamentable catastrophe has been kindly contributed by the graphic pen of the only survivor, Thomas Thurnall, Esquire, F.R.C.S., &c. &c. &c., late surgeon on board the ill-fated vessel." Which five columns not only put a couple of guineas into Tom's pocket, but, as he intended they should, brought him before the public as an interesting personage, and served as a very good advertisement to the practice which Tom had already established in fancy.

Tom had not worked long, however, before the Coast-guard Lieutenant bustled in. He had trotted home to shave and get his breakfast, and was trotting back again to the shore.

"Hillo, Heale! can I see the fellow who was saved last night?"

"I am that fellow," says Tom.

"The dickens you are! you seem to have fallen on your legs quickly enough."

"It's a trick I've had occasion to learn, Sir," says Tom. "Can I prescribe for you this morning?"

"Medicine?" roars the Lieutenant, laughing. "Catch me at it! No; I want you to come down to the shore, and help to identify goods and things. The wind has chopped up north, and is blowing dead on; and, with this tide, we shall have a good deal on shore. So, if you're strong enough—"

"I'm alway's strong enough to do my duty," said Tom.

"Hum! Very good sentiment, young man. Always strong enough for duty.—Hum! worthy of Nelson; said pretty much the same, didn't he? something about duty I know it was, and always thought it uncommon fine.—Now, then, what can you tell me about this business?"

It was a sad story; but no sadder than hundreds beside. They had been struck by the gale to the westward two days before, with the wind south; had lost their foretopmast and boltsprit, and become all but unmanageable; had tried during a lull to rig a jury-mast, but were prevented by the gale, which burst on them with fresh fury from the south-west, with very

heavy rain and fog; had passed a light in the night, which they took for Scilly, but which must have been the Longships; had still fancied that they were safe, running up Channel with a wide berth, when, about sunset, the gale had chopped again to north-west;—and Tom knew no more. "I was standing on the poop with the captain about ten o'clock. The last words he said to me were,—'If this lasts, we shall see Brest harbour to-morrow,' when she struck, and stopped dead. I was chucked clean off the poop, and nearly overboard; but brought up in the mizen rigging. Where the captain went, poor fellow, Heaven alone knows; for I never saw him after. The mainmast went like a carrot. The mizen stood. I ran round to the cabin-doors. There were four men steering; the wheel had broke out of the poor fellows' hands, and knocked them over,—broken their limbs, I believe. I was stooping to pick them up, when a sea came into the waist, and then aft, washing me in through the saloon-doors, among the poor half-dressed women and children. Queer sight, Lieutenant! I've seen a good many, but never worse than that. I bolted to my cabin, tied my notes and gold round me, and out again."

"Didn't desert the poor things?"

"Couldn't if I'd tried; they clung to me like a swarm of bees. 'Gad, Sir, that was hard lines! to have all the pretty women one had waltzed with every evening through the Trades, and the little children one had been making playthings for, holding round one's knees, and screaming to the doctor to save them. And how the * * * * was I to save them, Sir?" cried Tom, with a sudden burst of feeling, which, as in so many Englishmen, exploded in anger to avoid melting in tears.

"Ought to be a law against it, Sir," growled the Lieutenant; "against women-folk and children going to sea. It's murder and cruelty. I've been wrecked, scores of times; but it was with honest men, who could shift for themselves, and if they were drowned, drowned; but didn't screech and catch hold—I couldn't stand that! Well?"

"Well, there was a pretty little creature, an officer's widow, and two children. I caught her under one arm, and one of the children under the other; said—'I can't take you all at once; I'll come back for the rest, one by one.'—Not that I believed it; but anything to stop the screaming; and I did hope to put some of them out of the reach of the sea, if I could get them forward. I knew the forecastle was dry, for the chief officer was firing there. You heard him?"

"Yes, five or six times; and then he stopped suddenly."

"He had reason.—We got out. I could see her nose up in the air forty feet above us, covered with fore-cabin passengers.

I warped the lady and the children upward—Heaven knows how; for the sea was breaking over us very sharp—till we were at the mainmast stump, and holding on by the wreck of it. I felt the ship stagger as if a whale had struck her, and heard a roar and a swish behind me, and looked back—just in time to see mizen, and poop, and all the poor women and children in it, go bodily, as if they had been shaved off with a knife. I suppose that altered her balance; for before I could turn again she dived forward, and then rolled over upon her beam ends to leeward; and I saw the sea walk in over her from stem to stern like one white wall, and I was washed from my hold, and it was all over."

"What became of the lady?"

"I saw a white thing flash by to leeward;—what's the use of asking?"

"But the child you held?"

"I didn't let it go till there was good reason."

"Eh?"

Tom tapped the points of his fingers smartly against the side of his head, and then went on, in the same cynical drawl, which he had affected throughout:—

"I heard that—against a piece of timber as we went overboard. And, as a medical man, I considered after that, that I had done my duty. Pretty little boy it was, just six years old; and such a fancy for drawing."

The Lieutenant was quite puzzled by Tom's seeming nonchalance.

"What do you mean, Sir? Did you leave the child to perish?"

"Confound you, Sir! If you will have plain English, here it is. I tell you I heard the child's skull crack like an eggshell! There, let's talk no more about it, or the whole matter. It's a bad business, and I'm not answerable for it, or you either; so let's go and do what we are answerable for, and identify—"

"Sir! you will be so good as to recollect," said the Lieutenant, with ruffled plumes.

"I do; I do! I beg your pardon a thousand times, I'm sure, for being so rude: but you know as well as I, Sir, there are a good many things in the world which won't stand too much thinking over; and last night was one."

"Very true, very true; but how did you get ashore?"

"I get ashore? Oh, well enough! Why not?"

"'Gad, Sir, you were near enough being drowned at last; only that girl's pluck saved you."

"Well; but it did save me: and here I am, as I knew I should be when I first struck out from the ship."

"Knew!—that is a bold word for mortal man at sea."

"I suppose it is: but we doctors, you see, get into the way of looking at things as men of science; and the ground of science is experience; and, to judge from experience, it takes more to kill me than I have yet met with. If I had been going to be snuffed out, it would have happened long ago."

"Hum! It's well to carry a cheerful heart; but the pitcher goes often to the well, and comes home broken at last."

"I must be a gutta-percha pitcher, I think, then, or else—

'There's a sweet little cherub who sits up aloft,' &c.

as Dibdin has it. Now, look at the facts yourself, Sir," continued the stranger, with a recklessness half true, half assumed to escape from the malady of thought. "I don't want to boast, Sir; I only want to show you that I have some practical reason for wearing as my motto—'Never say die.' I have had the cholera twice, and yellow-jack beside; five several times I have had bullets through me; I have been bayoneted and left for dead; I have been shipwrecked three times—and once, as now, I was the only man who escaped; I have been fatted by savages for baking and eating, and got away with a couple of friends only a day or two before the feast. One really narrow chance I had, which I never expected to squeeze through: but, on the whole, I have taken full precautions to prevent its recurrence."

"What was that, then?"

"I have been hanged, Sir," said the Doctor quietly.

"Hanged?" cried the Lieutenant, facing round upon his strange companion with a visage which asked plainly enough—"You hanged? I don't believe you; and if you have been hanged, what have you been doing to get hanged?"

"You need not take care of your pockets, Sir,—neither robbery nor murder was it which brought me to the gallows; but innocent bug-hunting. The fact is, I was caught by a party of Mexicans, during the last war, straggling after plants and insects, and hanged as a spy. I don't blame the fellows: I had no business where I was; and they could not conceive that a man would risk his life for a few butterflies."

"But if you were hanged, Sir—"

"Why did I not die?—By my usual luck. The fellows were clumsy, and the noose would not work; so that the Mexican doctor, who meant to dissect me, brought me round again; and being a freemason, as I am, stood by me,—got me safe off, and cheated the devil."

The worthy Lieutenant walked on in silence, stealing furtive glances at Tom, as if he had been a guest from the other world,

but not disbelieving his story in the least. He had seen, as most old navy men, so many strange things happen, that he was prepared to give credit to any tale when told, as Tom's was, with a straightforward and unboastful simplicity.

"There lives the girl who saved you," said he, as they passed Grace Harvey's door.

"Ah? I ought to call and pay my respects."

But Grace was not at home. The wreck had emptied the school; and Grace had gone after her scholars to the beach.

"We couldn't keep her away, weak as she was," said a neighbour, "as soon as she heard the poor corpses were coming ashore."

"Hum!" said Tom. "True woman. Quaint,—that appetite for horrors the sweet creatures have. Did you ever see a man hanged, Lieutenant?—No? If you had, you would have seen two women in the crowd to one man. Can you make out the philosophy of that?"

"I suppose they like it, as some people do hot peppers."

"Or donkeys thistles;—find a little pain pleasant! I had a patient once in France, who read Dumas' 'Crimes Célèbres' all the week, and the 'Vies des Saints' on Sundays, and both, as far as I could see, for just the same purpose,—to see how miserable people could be, and how much pinching and pulling they could bear."

So they walked on, along a sheep-path, and over the Spur, and down to the Cove.

It was such a morning as often follows a gale, when the great firmament stares down upon the ruin which it has made, bright, and clear, and bold; and seems to say, with shameless smile,—"There, I have done it; and am as merry as ever after it all!" Beneath a cloudless sky, the breakers, still grey and foul from the tempest, were tumbling in before a cold northern breeze. Half a mile out at sea, the rough backs of the Chough and Crow loomed black and sulky in the foam. At their feet, the rocks and shingle of the Cove were alive with human beings—groups of women and children clustering round a corpse or a chest; sailors, knee-deep in the surf, hauling at floating spars and ropes; oil-skinned coast-guardsmen pacing up and down in charge of goods, while groups of farmers' men, who had hurried down from the villages inland, lounged about on the top of the cliff, looking sulkily on, hoping for plunder: and yet half afraid to mingle with the sailors below, who looked on them as an inferior race, and refused, in general, to intermarry with them.

The Lieutenant plainly held much the same opinion; for as a party of them tried to descend the narrow path to the beach, he shouted after them to come back.

"Eh? you won't?" and out rattled from its scabbard the old worthy's sword. "Come back, I say, you loafing, miching, wrecking crow-keepers; there are no pickings for you here. Brown, send those fellows back with the bayonet. None but blue-jackets allowed on the beach!" And the labourers go up again, grumbling.

"Can't trust those landsharks. They'll plunder even the rings off a corpse's fingers. They think every wreck a godsend. I've known them, after they've been driven off, roll great stones over the cliff at night on the coast-guard, just out of spite; while these blue-jackets here—I can depend on them. Can you tell me the reason of that, as you seem a bit of a philosopher?"

"It is easy enough; the sailors have a fellow-feeling with sailors, and the landsmen have none. Besides, the sailors are finer fellows, body and soul; and the reason is that they have been brought up to face danger, and the landsmen haven't."

"Well," said the Lieutenant, "unless a man has been taught to look death in the face, he never will grow up, I believe, to be much of a man at all."

"Danger, my good Sir, is a better schoolmaster than all your new model schools, diagrams, and scientific apparatus. It made our forefathers the masters of the sea, though they never heard of popular science; and I dare say couldn't, one out of ten of them, spell their own names."

This sentiment elicited from the Lieutenant a grunt of approbation, as Tom intended that it should do; shrewdly arguing that the old martinet was no friend to the modern superstition, that all which is required to cast out the devil is a smattering of the 'ologies.

"Will the gentleman see the corpses?" asked Brown; "we have fourteen already;"—and he led the way to where, along the shingle at high-water mark, lay a ghastly row, some fearfully bruised and mutilated, cramped together by the death agony; others with the peaceful smile which showed that they had sunk to sleep in that strange water-death, amid a wilderness of pleasant dreams. Strong men lay there, little children, women, whom the sailors' wives had covered decently with cloaks and shawls; and at their heads stood Grace Harvey, motionless, with folded hands, gazing into the dead faces with her great solemn eyes. Her mother and Captain Willis stood by, watching her with a sort of superstitious awe. She took no notice either of Thurnall or of the Lieutenant, as the doctor identified the bodies one by one, without a remark which indicated any human emotion.

"A very sensible man, Willis," said the Lieutenant, apart, as Tom knelt awhile to examine the crushed features of a sailor; and then looking up, said simply,—

"James Macgillivray, second mate. Cause of death, contusions; probably by the fall of the mainmast."

"A very sensible man, and has seen a deal of life, and kept his eyes open; but a terrible hard-plucked one. Talked like a book to me all the way; but, be hanged if I don't think he has a thirty-two pound shot under his ribs instead of a heart.—Doctor Thurnall, that is Miss Harvey,—the young person who saved your life last night."

Tom rose, took off his hat (Frank Headley's), and made her a bow, of which an ambassador need not have been ashamed.

"I am exceedingly shocked that Miss Harvey should have run so much danger for anything so worthless as my life."

She looked up at him, and answered, not him, but her own thoughts.

"Strange, is it not, that it was a duty to pray for all these poor things last night, and a sin to pray for them this morning?"

"Grace, dear!" interposed her mother, "don't you hear the gentleman thanking you?"

She started, as one awaking out of a dream, and looked into his face, blushing scarlet.

"Good heavens, what a beautiful creature!" said Tom to himself, as quite a new emotion passed through him. Quite new it was, whatsoever it was; and he was aware of it. He had had his passions, his intrigues, in past years, and prided himself—few men more—on understanding women; but the expression of the face, and the strange words with which she had greeted him, added to the broad fact of her having offered her own life for his, raised in him a feeling of chivalrous awe and admiration, which no other woman had ever called up.

"Madam," he said again; "I can repay you with nothing but thanks: but, to judge from your conduct last night, you are one of those people who will find reward enough in knowing that you have done a noble and heroic action."

She looked at him very steadfastly, blushing still. Thurnall, be it understood, was (at least, while his face was in the state in which Heaven intended it to be, half hidden in a silky-brown beard) a very good-looking fellow; and (to use Mark Armsworth's description) "as hard as a nail; as fresh as a rose; and stood on his legs like a game-cock." Moreover, as Willis said approvingly, he had spoken to her "as if he was a duke, and she was a duchess." Besides, by some blessed moral law, the surest way to make oneself love any human being is to go and do him a kindness; and therefore Grace had already a tender interest in Tom, not because he had saved her, but she him. And so it was, that a strange new emotion passed through her

heart also, though so little understood by her, that she put it forthwith into words.

"You might repay me," she said, in a sad and tender tone.

"You have only to command me," said Tom, wincing a little as the words passed his lips.

"Then turn to God, now in the day of his mercies. Unless you have turned to him already?"

One glance at Tom's rising eyebrows told her what he thought upon those matters.

She looked at him sadly, lingeringly, as if conscious that she ought not to look too long, and yet unable to withdraw her eyes.—"Ah! and such a precious soul as yours must be; a precious soul—all taken, and you alone left! God must have high things in store for you. He must have a great work for you to do. Else, why are you not as one of these? Oh, think! where would you have been at this moment if God had dealt with you as with them?"

"Where I am now, I suppose," said Tom quietly.

"Where you are now?"

"Yes; where I ought to be. I am where I ought to be now. I suppose if I had found myself anywhere else this morning, I should have taken it as a sign that I was wanted there, and not here."

Grace heaved a sigh at words which were certainly startling. The Stoic optimism of the world-hardened doctor was new and frightful to her.

"My good Madam," said he, "the part of Scripture which I appreciate best, just now, is the case of poor Job, where Satan has leave to rob and torment him to the utmost of his wicked will, provided only he does not touch his life. I wish," he went on, lowering his voice, "to tell you something which I do not wish publicly talked of; but in which you may help me. I had nearly fifteen hundred pounds about me when I came ashore last night, sewed in a belt round my waist. It is gone. That is all."

Tom looked steadily at her as he spoke. She turned pale, red, pale again, her lips quivered: but she spoke no word.

"She has it, as I live!" thought Tom to himself. "'Frailty, thy name is woman!' The canting, little, methodistical humbug! She must have slipped it off my waist as I lay senseless. I suppose she means to keep it in pawn, till I redeem it by marrying her. Well, I might take an uglier mate, certainly; but when I do enter into the bitter bonds of matrimony, I should like to be sure, beforehand, that my wife was not a thief!"

Why, then, did not Tom, if he were so very sure of Grace's

having the belt, charge her with the theft? Because he had found out already how popular she was, and was afraid of merely making himself unpopular; because, too, he took for granted that whosoever had his belt, had hidden it already beyond the reach of a search warrant; and, because, after all an honourable shame restrained him. It would be a poor return to the woman who had saved his life to charge her with theft the next morning; and more, there was something about that girl's face which had made him feel that, if he had seen her put the belt into her pocket before his eyes, he could not have found the heart to have sent her to gaol. "No!" thought he; "I'll get it out of her, or whoever has it, and stay here till I do get it. One place is as good as another to me."

But what was Grace saying?

She had turned, after two or three minutes' astonished silence, to her mother and Captain Willis—

"Belt! Mother! Uncle! What is this? The gentleman has lost a belt!"

"Dear me!—a belt? Well, child, that's not much to grieve over, when the Lord has spared his life and soul from the pit!" said her mother, somewhat testily.

"You don't understand. A belt, I say, full of money—fifteen hundred pounds; he lost it last night. Uncle? Speak, quick! Did you see a belt?"

Willis shook his head meditatively. "I don't, and yet I do, and yet I don't again. My brains were well-nigh washed out of me, I know. However, Sir, I'll think, and talk it over with you too; for if it be in the village, found it ought to be, and will be, with God's help."

"Found?" cried Grace, in so high a key, that Tom entreated her to calm herself, and not make the matter public.—"Found? yes; and shall be found, if there be justice in heaven. Shame, that west-country folk should turn robbers and wreckers! Mariners, too, and mariners' wives, who should be praying for those who are wandering far away, each man with his life in his hand! Ah, what a world! When will it end? soon, too soon, when west-country folk rob shipwrecked men! But you will find your belt; yes, Sir, you will find it. Wait till you have learnt to do without it. Man does not live by bread alone. Do you think he lives by gold? Only be patient; and when you are worthy of it, you shall find it again, in the Lord's good time."

To the doctor this seemed a mere burst of jargon, invented for the purpose of hiding guilt; and his faith in womankind was not heightened when he heard Grace's mother say, *sotto voce* to Willis, that—"In wrecks, and fires, and such like, a many people complained of having lost more than ever they had."

"Oh ho! my old lady, is that the way the fox is gone?" quoth Tom to that trusty counsellor, himself; and began carefully scrutinizing Mrs. Harvey's face. It had been very handsome: it was still very clever: but the eyebrows, crushed together downwards above her nose, and rising high at the outer corners, indicated, as surely as the restless down-dropt eye, a character self-conscious, furtive, capable of great inconsistencies, possibly of great deceits.

"You don't look me in the face, old lady!" quoth Tom to himself. "Very well! between you two it lies; unless that old gentleman implicates himself also, in his approaching confession."

He took his part at once. "Well, well, you will oblige me by saying nothing more about it. After all, as this good lady says, the loss of a little money is not worth complaining over, when one has escaped with life. Good morning; and many thanks for all your kindness!"

And Tom made another grand bow, and went off to the Lieutenant.

Grace looked after him awhile, as one stunned; and then turned to her mother.

"Let us go home."

"Go home? Why there, dear?"

"Let me go home; you need not come. I am sick of this world. Is it not enough to have misery and death, (and she pointed to the row of corpses,) but we must have sin, too, wherever we turn! Meanness and theft:—and ingratitude too!" she added, in a lower tone.

She went homeward; her mother, in spite of her entreaties, accompanied her; and, for some reason or other, did not lose sight of her all that day, or for several days after.

Meanwhile, Willis had beckoned the doctor aside. His face was serious and sad, and his lips were trembling.

"This is a very shocking business, Sir. Of course, you've told the Lieutenant."

"Not yet, my good Sir."

"But—excuse my boldness; what plainer way of getting it back from the rascal, whoever he is?"

"Wait awhile," said Tom; "I have my reasons."

"But, Sir—for the honour of the place, the matter should be cleared up; and till the thief's found, suspicion will lie on a dozen innocent men; myself among the rest, for that matter."

"You?" said Tom, smiling. "I don't know who I have the honour to speak to; but you don't look much like a gentleman who wishes for a trip to Botany Bay."

The old man chuckled, and then his face dropped again.

"I'm glad you take the thing so like a man, Sir; but it is really no laughing matter. It's a scoundrelly job, only fit for a Maltee off the Nix Mangeery. If it had been a lot of those carter fellows that had carried you up, I could have understood it; wrecking's born in the bone of them: but for those four sailors that carried you up, 'gad, Sir! they'd have been shot sooner. I've known 'em from boys!" and the old man spoke quite fiercely, and looked up; his lip trembling, and his eye moist.

"There's no doubt that you are honest—whoever is not," thought Tom; so he ventured a further question.

"Then you were by all the while?"

"All the while? Who more? And that's just what puzzles me."

"Pray don't speak loud," said Tom. "I have my reasons for keeping things quiet."

"I tell you, Sir. I held the maid, and big John Beer (Gentleman Jan they call him) held me; and the maid had both her hands tight in your belt. I saw it as plain as I see you, just before the wave covered us, though little I thought what was in it; and should never have remembered you had a belt at all, if I hadn't thought over things in the last five minutes."

"Well, Sir, I am lucky in having come straight to the fountain head; and must thank you for telling me so frankly what you know."

"Tell you, Sir? What else should one do but tell you? I only wish I knew more; and more I'll know, please the Lord. And you'll excuse an old sailor (though not of your rank, Sir) saying that he wonders a little that you don't take the plain means of knowing more yourself."

"May I take the liberty of asking your name?" said Tom; who saw by this time that the old man was worthy of his confidence.

"Willis, at your service, Sir. Captain they call me, though I'm none. Sailing-master I was, on board of His Majesty's ship Niobe, 84;" and Willis raised his hat with such an air, that Tom raised his in return.

"Then, Captain Willis, let me have five words with you apart; first thanking you for having helped to save my life."

"I'm very glad I did, Sir; and thanked God for it on my knees this morning: but you'll excuse me, Sir, I was thinking --and no blame to me—more of saving my poor maid's life than yours, and no offence to you, for I hadn't the honour of knowing you; but for her, I'd have been drowned a dozen times over."

"No offence, indeed," said Tom; and hardly knew what to

say next. "May I ask, is she your niece? I heard her call you uncle."

"Oh, no—no relation; only I look on her as my own, poor thing, having no father; and she always calls me Uncle, as most do us old men in the West."

"Well, then, Sir," said Tom, "you will answer for none of the four sailors having robbed me?"

"I've said it, Sir."

"Was any one else close to her when we were brought ashore?"

"No one but I. I brought her round myself."

"And who took her home?"

"Her mother and I."

"Very good. And you never saw the belt after she had her hands in it?"

"No; I'm sure not."

"Was her mother by her when she was lying on the rock?"

"No; came up afterwards, just as I got her on her feet."

"Humph! What sort of a character is her mother?"

"Oh, a tidy, God-fearing person, enough. One of these Methodist class-leaders, Brianites they call themselves. I don't hold with them, though I do go to chapel at whiles; but there are good ones among them; and I do believe she's one, though she's a little fretful at times. Keeps a little shop that don't pay over well; and those preachers live on her a good deal, I think. Creeping into widows' houses, and making long prayers—you know the text."

"Well, now, Captain Willis, I don't want to hurt your feelings; but do you not see that one of two things I must believe,—either that the belt was torn off my waist, and washed back into the sea, as it may have been after all; or else, that—"

"Do you mean that she took it?" asked Willis, in a voice of such indignant astonishment that Tom could only answer by a shrug of the shoulders.

"Who else could have done so, on your own showing?"

"Sir!" said Willis, slowly. "I thought I had to do with a gentleman: but I have my doubts of it now. A poor girl risks her life to drag you out of that sea, which but for her would have hove your body up to lie along with that line there,"—and Willis pointed to the ghastly row—"and your soul gone to give in its last account—You only know what that would have been like—And the first thing you do in payment is to accuse her of robbing you—her, that the very angels in heaven, I believe, are glad to keep company with;" and the old man turned and paced the beach in fierce excitement.

"Captain Willis," said Tom, "I'll trouble you to listen patiently and civilly to me a minute."

Willis stopped, drew himself up, and touched his hat mechanically.

"Just because I am a gentleman, I have not accused her; but held my tongue, and spoken to you in confidence. Now, perhaps, you will understand why I have said nothing to the Lieutenant."

Willis looked up at him.

"I beg your pardon, Sir. I see now, and I'm sorry if I was rude; but it took me aback, and does still. I tell you, Sir," quoth he, warming again, "whatever's true,—that's false. You're wrong there, if you never are wrong again; and you'll say so yourself, before you've known her a week. No, Sir! If you could make me believe that, I should never believe in goodness again on earth; but hold all men, and women too, and those above, for aught I know, that are greater than men and women, for liars together."

What was to be answered? Perhaps only what Tom did answer.

"My good Sir, I will say no more. I would not have said that much if I had thought I should have pained you so. I suppose that the belt was washed into the sea. Why not?"

"Why not, indeed, Sir? That's a much more Christian-like way of looking at it, than to blacken your own soul before God by suspecting that sweet innocent creature."

"Be it so, then. Only say nothing about the matter; and beg them to say nothing. If it be jammed among the rocks (as it might be, heavy as it is), talking about it will only set people looking for it; and I suppose there is a man or two, even in Aberalva, who would find fifteen hundred pounds a tempting bait. If, again, some one finds it, and makes away with it, he will only be the more careful to hide it if he knows that I am on the look-out. So just tell Miss Harvey and her mother that I think it must have been lost, and beg them to keep my secret. And now shake hands with me."

"The best plan, I believe, though bad, is the best," said Willis, holding out his hand; and he walked away sadly. His spirit had been altogether ruffled by the imputation on Grace's character; and, besides, the chances of Thurnall's recovering his money seemed to him very small.

In five minutes he returned.

"If you would allow me, Sir, there's a man there of whom I should like to ask one question. He who held me, and, after that, helped to carry you up;" and he pointed to Gentleman Jan, who stood, dripping from the waist downward, over a chest

which he had just secured. "Just let us ask him, off-hand like, whether you had a belt on when he carried you up. You may trust him, Sir. He'd knock you down as soon as look at you; but tell a lie, never."

They went to the giant; and, after cordial salutations, Tom propounded his question carelessly, with something like a white lie.

"It's no great matter; but it was an old friend, you see, with fittings for my knife and pistols, and I should be glad to find it again."

Jan thrust his red hand through his black curls, and meditated while the water surged round his ankles.

"Never a belt seed I, Sir; leastwise while you were in my hands. I had you round the waist all the way up, so no one could have took it off. Why should they? And I undressed you myself; and nothing, save your presence, was there to get off, but jersey and trousers, and a lump of backy against your skin that looked the right sort."

"Have some, then," said Tom, pulling out the honey-dew. "As for the belt, I suppose it's gone to choke the dog-fish."

And there the matter ended, outwardly at least; but only outwardly. Tom had his own opinion, gathered from Grace's seemingly guilty face, and to it he held, and called old Willis, in his heart, a simple-minded old dotard, who had been taken in by her hypocrisy.

And Tom accompanied the Lieutenant on his dreary errand that day, and several days after, through depositions before a justice, interviews with Lloyd's underwriters, and all the sad details which follow a wreck. Ere the week's end, forty bodies and more had been recovered, and brought up, ten or twelve at a time, to the churchyard, and upon the down, and laid side by side in one long shallow pit, where Frank Headley read over them the blessed words of hope, amid the sobs of women, and the grand silence of stalwart men, who knew not how soon their turn might come; and after each procession came Grace Harvey, with all her little scholars two and two, to listen to the funeral service; and when the last corpse was buried, they planted flowers upon the mound, and went their way again to learn hymns and read their Bible—little ministering angels to whom, as to most sailors' children, death was too common a sight to have in it aught of hideous or strange.

And this was the end of the good ship Hesperus, and all her gallant crew.

Verily, however important the mere animal lives of men may be, and ought to be, at times, in our eyes, they never have been so, to judge from floods and earthquakes, pestilence and storm,

in the eyes of Him who made and loves us all. It is a strange fact: better for us, instead of shutting our eyes to it because it interferes with our modern tenderness of pain, to ask honestly what it means.

CHAPTER V.

THE WAY TO WIN THEM.

So, for a week or more, Tom went on thrivingly enough, and became a general favourite in the town. Heale had no reason to complain of boarding him; for he had dinner and supper thrust on him every day by one and another, who were glad enough to have him for the sake of his stories, and songs, and endless fun and good-humour. The Lieutenant, above all, took the new-comer under his especial patronage, and was paid for his services in some of Tom's incomparable honey-dew. The old fellow soon found that the Doctor knew more than one old foreign station of his, and ended by pouring out to him his ancient wrongs, and the evil doings of the wicked admiral; all of which Tom heard with deepest sympathy, and surprise that so much naval talent had remained unappreciated by the unjust upper powers; and the Lieutenant, of course, reported of him accordingly to Heale.

"A very civil spoken and intelligent youngster, Mr. Heale, d'ye see, to my mind; and you can't do better than accept his offer; for you'll find him a great help, especially among the ladies, d'ye see. They like a good-looking chap, eh, Mrs. Jones?"

On the fourth day, by good fortune, what should come ashore but Tom's own chest—moneyless, alas! but with many useful matters still unspoilt by salt water. So, all went well, and indeed somewhat too well (if Tom would have let it), in the case of Miss Anna Maria Heale, the Doctor's daughter.

She was just such a girl as her father's daughter was likely to be; a short, stout, rosy, pretty body of twenty, with loose red lips, thwart black eyebrows, and right naughty eyes under them; of which Tom took good heed: for Miss Heale was exceedingly inclined, he saw, to make use of them in his behoof. Let others who have experience in, and taste for such matters, declare how she set her cap at the dapper young surgeon; how she rushed into the shop with sweet *abandon* ten times a-day, to find her father; and, not finding him, giggled, and blushed, and shook her shoulders, and retired, to peep at Tom through the glass door which led into the parlour; how she discovered that the muslin curtain of the said door would get out of order every ten minutes;

and at last called Mr. Thurnall to assist her in rearranging it; how, bolder grown, she came into the shop to help herself to various matters, inquiring tenderly for Tom's health, and giggling vulgar sentiments about "absent friends, and hearts left behind;" in the hope of fishing out whether Tom had a sweetheart or not. How, at last, she was minded to confide her own health to Tom, and to instal him as her private physician; yea, and would have made him feel her pulse on the spot, had he not luckily found some assafœtida, and therewith so perfumed the shop, that her "nerves" (of which she was always talking, though she had nerves only in the sense wherein a sirloin of beef has them) forced her to beat a retreat.

But she returned again to the charge next day, and rushed bravely through that fearful smell, cleaver in hand, as the carrier set down at the door a huge-box, carriage-paid, all the way from London, and directed to Thomas Thurnall, Esquire. She would help to open it; and so she did, while old Heale and his wife stood by curious,—he with a maudlin wonder and awe (for he regarded Tom already as an altogether awful and incomprehensible "party"), and Mrs. Heale with a look of incredulous scorn, as if she expected the box to be a mere sham, filled probably with shavings. For (from reasons best known to herself) she had never looked pleasantly on the arrangement which entrusted to Tom the care of the bottles. She had given way from motives of worldly prudence, even of necessity; for Heale had been for the greater part of the week quite incapable of attending to his business: but black envy and spite were seething in her foolish heart, and seethed more and more fiercely when she saw that the box did not contain shavings, but valuables of every sort and kind — drugs, instruments, a large microscope (which Tom delivered out of Miss Heale's fat clumsy fingers only by strong warnings that it would go off and shoot her), books full of prints of unspeakable monsters; and finally, a little packet, containing not one five-pound note, but four, and a letter which Tom, after perusing, put into Mr. Heale's hands, with a look of honest pride.

The Mumpsimus men, it appeared, had "sent round the hat" for him, and here were the results; and they would send the hat round again every month, if he wanted it; or, if he would come up, board, lodge, and wash him gratis. The great Doctor Bellairs, House Physician, and Carver, the famous operator, (names at which Heale bowed his head and worshipped,) sent compliments, condolences, offers of employment—never was so triumphant a testimonial; and Heale, in his simplicity, thought himself (as indeed he was) the luckiest of country doctors; while Mrs. Heale, after swelling and choking for five minutes, tottered into the back room, and cast herself on the sofa in violent hysterics.

As she came round again, Tom could not but overhear a little that passed. And this he overheard among other matters :—

"Yes, Mr. Heale, I see, I see too well, which your natural blindness, Sir, and that fatal easiness of temper, will bring you to a premature grave within the paupers' precincts; and this young designing infidel, with his science and his magnifiers, and his callipers, and philosophy falsely so called, which in our true Protestant youth there was none, nor needed none, to supplant you in your old age, and take the bread out of your grey hairs, which he will bring with sorrow to the grave, and mine likewise, which am like my poor infant here, of only too sensitive sensibilities! Oh, Anna Maria, my child, my poor lost child! which I can feel for the tenderness of the inexperienced heart! My Virgin Eve, which the Serpent has entered into your youthful paradise, and you will find, alas! too late, that you have warmed an adder into your bosom!"

"Oh, Ma, how indelicate!" giggled Anna Maria, evidently not displeased. "If you don't mind he will hear you, and I should never be able to look him in the face again." And therewith she looked round to the glass door.

What more passed, Tom did not choose to hear; for he began making all the bustle he could in the shop, merely saying to himself,—

"That flood of eloquence is symptomatic enough: I'll lay my life the old dame knows her way to the laudanum bottle."

Tom's next business was to ingratiate himself with the young Curate. He had found out already, cunning fellow, that any extreme intimacy with Headley would not increase his general popularity; and, as we have seen already, he bore no great affection to "the cloth" in general: but the Curate was an educated gentleman, and Tom wished for some more rational conversation than that of the Lieutenant and Heale. Besides, he was one of those men with whom the possession of power, sought at first from self-interest, has become a passion, a species of sporting, which he follows for its own sake. To whomsoever he met he must needs apply the moral stethoscope; sound him, lungs, heart, and liver; put his tissues under the microscope, and try conclusions on him to the uttermost. They might be useful hereafter; for knowledge was power: or they might not. What matter? Every fresh specimen of humanity which he examined was so much gained in general knowledge. Very true, Thomas Thurnall; provided the method of examination be the sound and the deep one, which will lead you down in each case to the real living heart of humanity: but what if your method be altogether a shallow and a cynical one, savouring much more of Gil Blas than of St. Paul, grounded not on faith and love for human

beings, but on something very like suspicion and contempt? You will be but too likely, Doctor, to make the coarsest mistakes, when you fancy yourself most penetrating; to mistake the mere scurf and disease of the character for its healthy organic tissue, and to find out at last, somewhat to your confusion, that there are more things, not only in heaven, but in the earthiest of the earth, than are dreamt of in your philosophy. You have already set down Grace Harvey as a hypocrite, and Willis as a dotard. Will you make up your mind in the same foolishness of over-wisdom, that Frank Headley is a merely narrow-headed and hard-hearted pedant, quite unaware that he is living an inner life of doubts, struggles, prayers, self-reproaches, noble hunger after an ideal of moral excellence, such as you, friend Tom, never yet dreamed of, which would be to you as an unintelligible gibber of shadows out of dreamland, but which is to him the only reality, the life of life, for which everything is to be risked and suffered? You treat his opinions (though he never thrusts them on you) about "the Church," and his duty, and the souls of his parishioners, with civil indifference, as much ado about nothing; and his rubrical eccentricities as puerilities. You have already made up your mind to "try and put a little common sense into him," not because it is any concern of yours whether he has common sense or not, but because you think that it will be better for you to have the parish at peace; but has it ever occurred to you how noble the man is, even in his mistakes? How that one thought, that the finest thing in the world is to be utterly good, and to make others good also, puts him three heavens at least above you, you most unangelic terrier-dog, bemired all day long by grubbing after vermin! What if his idea of "the Church" be somewhat too narrow for the year of grace 1854, is it no honour to him that he has such an idea at all; that there has risen up before him the vision of a perfect polity, a "Divine and wonderful Order," linking earth to heaven, and to the very throne of Him who died for men; witnessing to each of its citizens what the world tries to make him forget, namely, that he is the child of God himself; and guiding and strengthening him, from the cradle to the grave, to do his Father's work? Is it a shame to him that he has seen that such a polity must exist, that he believes that it does exist, or that he thinks he finds it in its highest, if not its perfect form, in the most ancient and august traditions of his native land? True, he has much to learn, and you may teach him something of it; but you will find some day, Thomas Thurnall, that, granting you to be at one pole of the English character, and Frank Headley at the other, he is as good an Englishman as you, and can teach you more than you can him.

The two soon began to pass almost every evening together,

pleasantly enough; for the reckless and rattling manner which Tom assumed with the mob, he laid aside with the Curate, and showed himself as agreeable a companion as man could need; while Tom in his turn found that Headley was a rational and sweet-tempered man, who, even where he had made up his mind to differ, could hear an adverse opinion, put sometimes in a startling shape, without falling into any of those male hysterics of sacred horror, which are the usual refuge of ignorance and stupidity, terrified by what it cannot refute. And soon Tom began to lay aside the reserve which he usually assumed to clergymen, and to tread on ground which Headley would gladly have avoided. For, to tell the truth, ever since Tom had heard of Grace's intended dismissal, the Curate's opinions had assumed a practical importance in his eyes; and he had vowed in secret that, if his cunning failed him not, turned out of her school she should not be. Whether she had stolen his money or not, she had saved his life; and nobody should wrong her, if he could help it. Besides, perhaps she had not his money. The belt might have slipped off in the struggle; some one else might have taken it off in carrying him up; he might have mistaken the shame of innocence in her face for that of guilt. Be it as it might, he had not the heart to make the matter public, and contented himself with staying at Aberalva, and watching for every hint of his lost treasure.

By which it befel that he was thinking, the half of every day at least, about Grace Harvey; and her face was seldom out of his mind's eye: and the more he looked at it, either in fancy or in fact, the more did it fascinate him. They met but rarely, and then interchanged the most simple and modest of salutations: but Tom liked to meet her, would have gladly stopped to chat with her; however, whether from modesty or from a guilty conscience, she always hurried on in silence.

And she? Tom's request to her, through Willis, to say nothing about the matter, she had obeyed, as her mother also had done. That Tom suspected her was a thought which never crossed her mind; to suspect any one herself was in her eyes a sin; and if the fancy that this man or that, among the sailors who had carried Tom up to Heale's, might have been capable of the baseness, she thrust the thought from her, and prayed to be forgiven for her uncharitable judgment.

But night and day there weighed on that strange and delicate spirit the shame of the deed, as heavily, if possible, as if she herself had been the doer. There was another soul in danger of perdition; another black spot of sin, making earth hideous to her. The village was disgraced; not in the public eyes, true: but in the eye of heaven, and in the eyes of that stranger for

whom she was beginning to feel an interest more intense than she ever had done in any human being before. Her saintliness (for Grace was a saint in the truest sense of that word) had long since made her free of that "communion of saints" which consists not in Pharisaic isolation from "the world," not in the mutual flatteries and congratulations of a self-conceited clique; but which bears the sins and carries the sorrows of all around: whose atmosphere is disappointed hopes and plans for good, and the indignation which hates the sin because it loves the sinner, and sacred fear and pity for the self-inflicted miseries of those who might be (so runs the dream, and will run till it becomes a waking reality) strong, and free, and safe, by being good and wise. To such a spirit this bold cunning man had come, stiff-necked and heaven-defiant, a "brand plucked from the burning:" and yet equally unconscious of his danger, and thankless for his respite. Given, too, as it were, into her hands; tossed at her feet out of the very mouth of the pit,—why but that she might save him? A far duller heart, a far narrower imagination than Grace's would have done what Grace's did—concentrate themselves round the image of that man with all the love of woman. For, ere long, Grace found that she did love that man, as a woman loves but once in her life; perhaps in all time to come. She found that her heart throbbed, her cheek flushed, when his name was mentioned; that she watched, almost unawares to herself, for his passing; and she was not ashamed at the discovery. It was a sort of melancholy comfort to her that there was a great gulf fixed between them. His station, his acquirements, his great connexions and friends in London, (for all Tom's matters were the gossip of the town, as, indeed, he took care that they should be,) made it impossible that he should ever think of her; and therefore she held herself excused for thinking of him, without any fear of that "self-seeking," and "inordinate affection," and "unsanctified passions," which her religious books had taught her to dread. Besides, he was not "a Christian." That five minutes on the shore had told her that; and even if her station had been the same as his, she must not be "unequally yoked with an unbeliever." And thus the very hopelessness of her love became its food and strength; the feeling which she would have checked with maidenly modesty, had it been connected even remotely with marriage, was allowed to take immediate and entire dominion; and she held herself permitted to keep him next her heart of hearts, because she could do nothing for him but pray for his conversion.

And pray for him she did, the noble, guileless girl, day and night, that he might be converted; that he might prosper, and

become—perhaps rich, at least useful; a mighty instrument in some good work. And then she would build up one beautiful castle in the air after another, out of her fancies about what such a man, whom she had invested in her own mind with all the wisdom of Solomon, might do if his "talents were sanctified." Then she prayed that he might recover his lost gold—when it was good for him; that he might discover the thief: no—that would only involve fresh shame and sorrow: that the thief, then, might be brought to repentance, and confession, and restitution. That was the solution of the dark problem, and for that she prayed; while her face grew sadder and sadder day by day.

For a while, over and above the pain which the theft caused her, there came—how could it be otherwise?—sudden pangs of regret that this same love was hopeless, at least upon this side of the grave. Inconsistent they were with the chivalrous unselfishness of her usual temper; and as such she dashed them from her, and conquered them, after a while, by a method which many a woman knows too well. It was but "one cross more;" a natural part of her destiny—the child of sorrow and heaviness of heart. Pleasure in joy she was never to find on earth; she would find it, then, in grief. And nursing her own melancholy, she went on her way, sad, sweet, and steadfast, and lavished more care and tenderness, and even gaiety, than ever upon her neighbours' children, because she knew that she should never have a child of her own.

But there is a third damsel, to whom, whether more or less engaging than Grace Harvey or Miss Heale, my readers must needs be introduced. Let Miss Heale herself do it, with eyes full of jealous curiosity.

"There is a foreign letter for Mr. Thurnall, marked Montreal, and sent on here from Whitbury," said she, one morning at breakfast, and in a significant tone; for the address was evidently in a woman's hand.

"For me—ah, yes; I see," said Tom, taking it carelessly, and thrusting it into his pocket.

"Won't you read it at once, Mr. Thurnall? I'm sure you must be anxious to hear from friends abroad;" with an emphasis on the word friends.

"I have a good many acquaintances all over the world, but no friends that I am aware of," said Tom, and went on with his breakfast.

"Ah—but some people are more than friends. Are the Montreal ladies pretty, Mr. Thurnall?"

"Don't know; for I never was there."

Miss Heale was silent, being mystified: and, moreover, not

quite sure whether Montreal was in India or in Australia, and not willing to show her ignorance.

She watched Tom through the glass door all the morning to see if he read the letter, and betrayed any emotion at its contents: but Tom went about his business as usual, and, as far as she saw, never read it at all.

However, it was read in due time; for, finding himself in a lonely place that afternoon, Tom pulled it out with an anxious face, and read a letter written in a hasty ill-formed hand, underscored at every fifth word, and plentifully bedecked with notes of exclamation.

"What? my dearest friend, and fortune still frowns upon you? Your father blind and ruined! Ah, that I were there to comfort him for your sake! And ah, that I were anywhere, doing any drudgery, which might prevent my being still a burden to my benefactors. Not that they are unkind; not that they are not angels! I told them at once that you could send me no more money till you reached England, perhaps not then; and they answered that God would send it; that He who had sent me to them would send the means of supporting me; and ever since they have redoubled their kindness: but it is intolerable, this dependence, and on you, too, who have a father to support in his darkness. Oh, how I feel for you! But to tell you the truth, I pay a price for this dependence. I must needs be staid and sober; I must needs dress like any Quakeress, I must not read this book nor that; and my Shelley—taken from me, I suppose, because it spoke too much 'Liberty,' though, of course, the reason given was its infidel opinions—is replaced by 'Law's Serious Call.' 'Tis all right and good, I doubt not: but it is very dreary; as dreary as these black fir-forests, and brown snake fences, and that dreadful, dreadful Canadian winter which is past, which went to my very heart, day after day, like a sword of ice. Another such winter, and I shall die, as one of my own humming-birds would die, did you cage him here, and prevent him from fleeing home to the sunny South when the first leaves begin to fall. Dear children of the sun! my heart goes forth to them; and the whir of their wings is music to me, for it tells me of the South, the glaring South, with its glorious flowers, and glorious woods, its luxuriance, life, fierce enjoyments—let fierce sorrows come with them, if it must be so! Let me take the evil with the good, and live my rich wild life through bliss and agony, like a true daughter of the sun, instead of crystallizing slowly here into ice, amid countenances rigid with respectability, sharpened by the lust of gain; without taste, without emotion, without even sorrow! Let who will be the stagnant mill-head, crawling in its ugly spade-cut ditch to turn

the mill. Let me be the wild mountain brook, which foams and flashes over the rocks—what if they tear it?—it leaps them nevertheless, and goes laughing on its way. Let me go thus, for weal or woe! And if I sleep awhile, let it be like the brook, beneath the shade of fragrant magnolias and luxuriant vines, and image, meanwhile, in my bosom nothing but the beauty around.

"Yes, my friend, I can live no longer this dull chrysalid life, in comparison with which, at times, even that past dark dream seems tolerable—for amid its lurid smoke were flashes of brightness. A slave? Well; I ask myself at times, and what were women meant for but to be slaves? Free them, and they enslave themselves again, or languish unsatisfied; for they must love. And what blame to them if they love a white man, tyrant though he be, rather than a fellow-slave? If the men of our own race will claim us, let them prove themselves worthy of us! Let them rise, exterminate their tyrants, or, failing that, show that they know how to die. Till then, those who are the masters of their bodies will be the masters of our hearts. If they crouch before the white like brutes, what wonder if we look up to him as to a god? Woman must worship, or be wretched. Do I not know it? Have I not had my dream—too beautiful for earth? Was there not one whom you knew, to hear whom call me slave would have been rapture; to whom I would have answered on my knees, Master, I have no will but yours! But that is past—past. One happiness alone was possible for a slave, and even that they tore from me; and now I have no thought, no purpose, save revenge.

"These good people bid me forgive my enemies. Easy enough for them, who have no enemies to forgive. Forgive? Forgive injustice, oppression, baseness, cruelty? Forgive the devil, and bid him go in peace, and work his wicked will? Why have they put into my hands, these last three years, books worthy of a free nation?—books which call patriotism divine; which tell me how in every age and clime men have been called heroes who rose against their conquerors; women martyrs who stabbed their tyrants, and then died? Hypocrites! Did their grandfathers meekly turn the other cheek when your English taxed them somewhat too heavily? Do they not now teach every school-child to glory in their own revolution, their own declaration of independence, and to flatter themselves into the conceit that they are the lords of creation, and the examples of the world, because they asserted that sacred right of resistance which is discovered to be unchristian in the African? They will free us, forsooth, in good time (is it to be in God's good time, or in their own?), if we will but be patient, and endure the rice-swamp, the scourge, the

slave-market, and shame unspeakable, a few years more, till all is ready and safe,—for them. Dreamers as well as hypocrites! What nation was ever freed by others' help? I have been reading history to see,—you do not know how much I have been reading,—and I find that freemen have always freed themselves, as we must do; and as they will never let us do, because they know that with freedom must come retribution; that our Southern tyrants have an account to render, which the cold Northerner has no heart to see him pay. For, after all, he loves the Southerner better than the slave; and fears him more also. What if the Southern aristocrat, who lords it over him as the panther does over the ox, should transfer (as he has threatened many a time) the cowhide from the negro's loins to his? No; we must free ourselves! And there lives one woman, at least, who, having gained her freedom, knows how to use it in eternal war against all tyrants. Oh, I could go down, I think at moments, down to New Orleans itself, with a brain and lips of fire, and speak words—you know how I could speak them—which would bring me in a week to the scourge, perhaps to the stake. The scourge I could endure. Have I not felt it already? Do I not bear its scars even now, and glory in them; for they were won by speaking as a woman should speak? And even the fire?—Have not women been martyrs already? and could not I be one? Might not my torments madden a people into manhood, and my name become a war-cry in the sacred fight? And yet, oh my friend, life is sweet!—and my little day has been so dark and gloomy!—may I not have one hour's sunshine, ere youth and vigour are gone, and my swift-vanishing Southern womanhood wrinkles itself up into despised old age? Oh, council me,—help me, my friend, my preserver, my true master now, so brave, so wise, so all-knowing; under whose mask of cynicism lies hid (have I not cause to know it?) the heart of a hero.

MARIE."

If Miss Heale could have watched Tom's face as he read, much more could she have heard his words as he finished, all jealousy would have passed from her mind: for as he read, the cynical smile grew sharper and sharper, forming a fit prelude for the "Little fool!" which was his only comment.

"I thought you would have fallen in love with some honest farmer years ago: but a martyr you shan't be, even if I have to send for you hither; though how to get you bread to eat I don't know. However, you have been reading your book, it seems,—clever enough you always were, and too clever; so you could go out as governess, or something. Why, here's a postscript dated three months afterwards! Ah, I see; this letter was written

last July, in answer to my Australian one. What's the meaning of this?" And he began reading again.

"I wrote so far; but I had not the heart to send it: it was so full of repinings. And since then,—must I tell the truth?—I have made a step; do not call it a desperate one; do not blame me, for your blame I cannot bear: but I have gone on the stage. There was no other means of independence open to me; and I had a dream, I have it still, that there, if anywhere, I might do my work. You told me that I might become a great actress: I have set my heart on becoming one; on learning to move the hearts of men, till the time comes when I can tell them, show them, in living flesh and blood, upon the stage, the secrets of a slave's sorrows, and that slave a woman. The time has not come for that yet here: but I have had my success already, more than I could have expected; and not only in Canada, but in the States. I have been at New York, acting to crowded houses. Ah, when they applauded me, how I longed to speak! to pour out my whole soul to them, and call upon them, as men, to ———. But that will come in time. I have found a friend, who has promised to write dramas especially for me. Merely republican ones at first; in which I can give full vent to my passion, and hurl forth the eternal laws of liberty, which their consciences may—must—at last, apply for themselves. But soon, he says, we shall be able to dare to approach the real subject, if not in America, still in Europe; and then, I trust, the coloured actress will stand forth as the championess of her race, of all who are oppressed, in every capital in Europe, save, alas! Italy and the Austria who crushes her. I have taken, I should tell you, an Italian name. It was better, I thought, to hide my African taint, forsooth, for awhile. So the wise New Yorkers have been fêting, as Maria Cordifiamma, the white woman (for am I not fairer than many an Italian signora?), whom they would have looked on as an inferior being under the name of Marie Lavington: though there is finer old English blood running in my veins, from your native Berkshire they say, than in any a Down-Easter's who hangs upon my lips. Address me henceforth, then, as La Signora Maria Cordifiamma. I am learning fast, by the bye, to speak Italian. I shall be at Quebec till the end of the month. Then, I believe, I come to London; and we shall meet once more: and I shall thank you, thank you, thank you, once more, for all your marvellous kindness."

"Humph!" said Tom, after a while. "Well, she is old enough to choose for herself. Five-and-twenty she must be by now. . . . As for the stage, I suppose it is the best place for her; better, at least, than turning governess, and going mad, as she would do, over her drudgery and her dreams. But who is this friend? Singing-

master, scribbler, or political refugee? or perhaps all three together? A dark lot, those fellows. I must keep my eye on him; though it's no concern of mine. I've done my duty by the poor thing; the devil himself can't deny that. But somehow, if this play-writing worthy plays her false, I feel very much as if I should be fool enough to try whether I have forgotten my pistol-shooting."

CHAPTER VI.

AN OLD FOE WITH A NEW FACE.

"This child's head is dreadfully hot; and how yellow he does look!" says Mrs. Vavasour, fussing about in her little nursery. "Oh, Clara, what shall I do? I really dare not give them any more medicine myself; and that horrid old Doctor Heale is worse than no one."

"Ah, Ma'am," says Clara, who is privileged to bemoan herself, and to have sad confidences made to her, "if we were but in town now, to see Mr. Chilvers, or any one that could be trusted; but in this dreadful out-of-the-way place—"

"Don't talk of it, Clara! Oh, what will become of the poor children?" And Mrs. Vavasour sits down and cries, as she does three times at least every week.

"But indeed, Ma'am, if you thought you could trust him, there is that new assistant—"

"The man who was saved from the wreck? Why, nobody knows who he is."

"Oh, but indeed, Ma'am, he is a very nice gentleman, I can say that; and so wonderfully clever; and has cured so many people already, they say, and got down a lot of new medicines (for he has great friends among the doctors in town), and such a wonderful magnifying glass, with which he showed me himself, as I dropped into the shop promiscous, such horrible things, Ma'am, in a drop of water, that I haven't dared hardly to wash my face since."

"And what good will the magnifying glass do to us?" says the poor little Irish soul, laughing up through its tears. "He won't want it to see how ill poor Frederick is, I'm sure; but you may send for him, Clara."

"I'll go myself, Ma'am, and make sure," says Clara; glad enough of a run, and chance of a chat with the young Doctor.

And in half an hour Mr. Thurnall is announced.

Though Mrs. Vavasour has a flannel apron on (for she will wash the children herself, in spite of Elsley's grumblings), Tom

sees that she is a lady; and puts on, accordingly, his very best manner, which, as his experience has long since taught him, is no manner at all.

He does his work quietly and kindly, and bows himself out.

"You will be sure to send the medicine immediately, Mr. Thurnall."

"I will bring it myself, Madam; and, if you like, administer it. I think the young gentleman has made friends with me sufficiently already."

"Tom keeps his word, and is back, and away again to his shop, in a marvellously short space, having "struck a fresh root," as he calls it; for—

"What a very well-behaved sensible man that Mr. Thurnall is," says Lucia to Elsley, an hour after, as she meets him coming in from the garden, where he has been polishing his "Wreck." "I am sure he understands his business; he was so kind and quiet, and yet so ready, and seemed to know all the child's symptoms beforehand, in such a strange way. I do hope he'll stay here. I feel happier about the poor children than I have for a long time."

"Thurnall?" asks Elsley, who is too absorbed in the "Wreck" to ask after the children; but the name catches his ear.

"Mr. Heale's new assistant—the man who was wrecked," answers she, too absorbed, in her turn, in the children to notice her husband's startled face.

"Thurnall? Which Thurnall?"

"Do you know the name? It's not a common one," says she, moving to the door.

"No—not a common one at all! You said the children were not well?'!

"I am glad that you thought of asking after the poor things."

"Why, really, my dear—" But before he can finish his excuse (probably not worth hearing), she has trotted up-stairs again to the nest, and is as busy as ever. Possibly Clara might do the greater part of what she does, and do it better: but still, are they not her children? Let those who will call a mother's care mere animal instinct, and liken it to that of the sparrow or the spider: shall we not rather call it a Divine inspiration, and doubt whether the sparrow and the spider must not have souls to be saved, if they, too, show forth that faculty of maternal love which is, of all human feelings, most inexplicable and most self-sacrificing; and therefore, surely, most heavenly? If that does not come down straight from heaven, a "good and perfect gift," then what is heaven, and what the gifts which it sends down?

But poor Elsley may have had solid reasons for thinking more

of the name of Thurnall than of his children's health: we will hope so for his sake; for, after sundry melodramatic pacings and starts, (Elsley was of a melodramatic turn, and fond of a scene, even when he had no spectator, not even a looking-glass;) besides ejaculations of "It cannot be!" "If it were!" "I trust not!" "A fresh ghost to torment me!" "When will come the end of this accursed coil which I have wound round my life?" and so forth, he decided aloud that the suspense was intolerable; and enclosing himself in his poetical cloak and Mazzini wide-awake, strode down to the town, and into the shop. And as he entered it, "his heart sank to his midriff, and his knees below were loosed." For there, making up pills, in a pair of brown-holland sleeves of his own manufacture (for Tom was a good seamster, as all travellers should be), whistled Lilliburlero, as of old, the Tom of other days, which Elsley's muse would fain have buried in a thousand Lethes.

Elsley came forward to the counter carelessly, nevertheless, after a moment. "What with my beard, and the lapse of time," thought he, "he cannot know me." So he spoke,—

"I understand you have been visiting my children, Sir. I hope you did not find them seriously indisposed?"

"Mr. Vavasour?" says Tom, with a low bow.

"I am Mr. Vavasour!" But Elsley was a bad actor, and hesitated and coloured so much as he spoke, that if Tom had known nothing, he might have guessed something.

"Nothing serious, I assure you, Sir; unless you are come to announce any fresh symptom."

"Oh, no—not at all—that is—I was passing on my way to the quay, and thought it as well to have your own assurance; Mrs. Vavasour is so over-anxious."

"You seem to partake of her infirmity, Sir," says Tom, with a smile and a bow. "However, it is one which does you both honour."

An awkward pause.

"I hope I am not taking a liberty, Sir; but I think I am bound to—"

"What in heaven is he going to say?" thought Elsley to himself, feeling very much inclined to run away.

"Thank you for all the pleasure and instruction which your writings have given me in lonely hours, and lonely places too. Your first volume of poems has been read by one man, at least, beside wild watch-fires in the Rocky Mountains."

Tom did not say that he pitched the said volume into the river in disgust; and that it was, probably, long since used up as housematerial by the caddis-baits of those parts,—for doubtless there are caddises there as elsewhere.

Poor Elsley rose at the bait, and smiled and bowed in silence.

"I have been so long absent from England, and in utterly wild countries, too, that I need hardly be ashamed to ask if you have written anything since 'The Soul's Agonies'? No doubt if you have, I might have found it at Melbourne, on my way home: but my visit there was a very hurried one. However, the loss is mine, and the fault too, as I ought to call it."

"Pray make no excuses," says Elsley, delighted. "I have written, of course. Who can help writing, Sir, while Nature is so glorious, and man so wretched? One cannot but take refuge from the pettiness of the real in the contemplation of the ideal. Yes, I have written. I will send you my last book down. I don't know whether you will find me improved."

"How can I doubt that I shall?"

Saddened, perhaps; perhaps more severe in my taste; but we will not talk of that. I owe you a debt, Sir, for having furnished me with one of the most striking 'motifs' I ever had. I mean that miraculous escape of yours. It is seldom enough, in this dull every-day world, one stumbles on such an incident ready made to one's hands, and needing only to be described as one sees it."

And the weak, vain man chatted on, and ended by telling Tom all about his poem of "The Wreck," in a tone which seemed to imply that he had done Tom a serious favour, perhaps raised him to immortality, by putting him in a book.

Tom thanked him gravely for the said honour, bowed him at last out of the shop, and then vaulted back clean over the counter, as soon as Elsley was out of sight, and commenced an Indian war-dance of frantic character, accompanying himself by an extemporary chaunt, with which the name of John Briggs was frequently intermingled;—

> "If I don't know you, Johnny my boy,
> In spite of all your beard;
> Why then I am a slower fellow,
> Than ever has yet appeared."

"Oh if it was but he! what a card for me! What a world it is for poor honest rascals like me to try a fall with!—

> 'Why didn't I take bad verse to make,
> And call it poetry;
> And so make up to an earl's daughter,
> Which was of high degree?"

But perhaps I am wrong after all: no—I saw he knew me, the humbug; though he never was a humbug, never rose above the rank of fool. However, I'll make assurance doubly sure, and then,—if it pays me not to tell him I know him, I

won't tell him; and if it pays me to tell him, I will tell him. Just as you choose, my good Mr. Poet." And Tom returned to his work singing an extempore parody of "We met, 'twas in a crowd," ending with—

"And thou art the cause of this anguish, my pill-box,"

in a howl so doleful, that Mrs. Heale marched into the shop, evidently making up her mind for an explosion.

"I am very sorry, Sir, to have to speak to you upon such a subject, but I must say, that the profane songs, Sir, which our house is not at all accustomed to them; not to mention that at your time of life, and in your position, Sir, as my husband's assistant, though there's no saying (with a meaning toss of the head) how long it may last,"—and there, her grammar having got into a hopeless knot, she stopped.

Tom looked at her cheerfully and fixedly. "I had been expecting this," said he to himself. "Better show the old cat at once that I carry claws as well as she."

"There *is* saying, Madam, humbly begging your pardon, how long my present engagement will last. It will last just as long as I like."

Mrs. Heale boiled over with rage: but ere the geyser could explode, Tom had continued in that dogged, nasal Yankee twang which he assumed when he was venomous:

"As for the songs, Ma'am, there are two ways of making oneself happy in this life; you can judge for yourself which is best. One is to do one's work like a man, and hum a tune, to keep one's spirits up; the other is to let the work go to rack and ruin, and keep one's spirits up, if one is a gentleman, by a little too much brandy;—if one is a lady, by a little too much laudanum."

"Laudanum, Sir?" almost screamed Mrs. Heale, turning pale as death.

"The pint bottle of best laudanum, which I had from town a fortnight ago, Ma'am, is now nearly empty, Ma'am. I will make affidavit that I have not used a hundred drops, or drunk one. I suppose it was the cat. Cats have queer tastes in the West, I believe. I have heard the cat coming down stairs into the surgery, once or twice after I was in bed; so I set my door ajar a little, and saw her come up again: but whether she had a vial in her paws—"

"Oh, Sir!" says Mrs. Heale, bursting into tears. "And after the dreadful toothache which I have had this fortnight, which nothing but a little laudanum would ease it; and at my time of life, to mock a poor elderly lady's infirmities, which I did not look for this cruelty and outrage!"

"Dry your tears, my dear madam," says Tom, in his most winning tone. "You will always find me the thorough gentleman, I am sure. If I had not been one, it would have been easy enough for me, with my powerful London connexions,—though I won't boast,—to set up in opposition to your good husband, instead of saving him labour in his good old age. Only, my dear Madam, how shall I get the laudanum-bottle refilled without the Doctor's—you understand?"

The wretched old woman hurried up stairs, and brought him down a half-sovereign out of her private hoard, trembling like an aspen leaf, and departed.

"So—scotched, but not killed. You'll gossip and lie too. Never trust a laudanum drinker. You'll see me, by the eye of imagination, committing all the seven deadly sins; and by the tongue of inspiration go forth and proclaim the same at the town-head. I can't kill you, and I can't cure you, so I must endure you. What said old Goethe, in all the German I ever cared to recollect:—

'Der Wallfisch hat doch seine Laus;
Muss auch die meine haben.'

"Now, then, for Mrs. Penberthy's draughts. I wonder how that pretty schoolmistress goes on. If she were but honest, now, and had fifty thousand pounds—why then, she wouldn't marry me; and so why now, I wouldn't marry she,—as my native Berkshire grammar would render it."

CHAPTER VII.

LA CORDIFIAMMA.

This chapter shall begin, good reader, with one of those startling bursts of "illustration," with which our most popular preachers are wont now to astonish and edify their hearers, and after starting with them at the opening of the sermon from the north-pole, the Crystal Palace, or the nearest cabbage-garden, float them safe, upon the gushing stream of oratory, to the safe and well-known shores of doctrinal commonplace, lost in admiration at the skill of the good man who can thus make all roads lead, if not to heaven, at least to strong language about its opposite. True, the logical sequence of their periods may be, like that of the coming one, somewhat questionable, reminding one at moments of Fluellen's comparison between Macedon and Monmouth, Henry the Fifth and Alexander: but, in the logic

of the pulpit, all's well that ends well, and the end must needs sanctify the means. There is, of course, some connexion or other between all things in heaven and earth, or how would the universe hold together? And if one has not time to find out the true connexion, what is left but to invent the best one can for oneself? Thus argues, probably, the popular preacher, and fills his pews, proving thereby clearly the excellence of his method. So argue also, probably, the popular poets, to whose "luxuriant fancy" everything suggests anything, and thought plays leap-frog with thought down one page and up the next, till one fancies at moments that they had got permission from the higher powers, before looking at the universe, to stir it all up a few times with a spoon. It is notorious, of course, that poets and preachers alike pride themselves upon this method of astonishing; that the former call it, "seeing the infinite in the finite;" the latter—"pressing secular matters into the service of the sanctuary," and other pretty phrases which, for reverence' sake, shall be omitted. No doubt they have their reasons and their reward. The style takes; the style pays; and what more would you have? Let them go on rejoicing, in spite of the cynical pedants in the Saturday Review, who dare to accuse (will it be believed?) these luminaries of the age of talking merely irreverent nonsense. Meanwhile, so evident is the success (sole test of merit) which has attended the new method, that it is worth while trying whether it will not be as taking in the novel as it is in the chapel; and therefore the reader is requested to pay special attention to the following paragraph, modelled carefully after the exordiums of a famous Irish preacher, now drawing crowded houses at the West End of Town. As thus:—"It is the pleasant month of May, when, as in old Chaucer's time, the—

> "Smale foules maken melodie,
> That slepen alle night with open eye
> So priketh hem nature in their corages.
> Then longen folk to goe on pilgrimages,
> And specially from every shire's end
> Of Englelond, to Exeter-hall they wend,"

till the low places of the Strand blossom with white cravats, those lilies of the valley, types of meekness and humility, at least in the pious palmer—and why not of similar virtues in the undertaker, the concert-singer, the groom, the tavern-waiter, the croupier at the gaming-table, and Frederick Augustus Lord Scoutbush, who, white-cravated like the rest, is just getting into his cab at the door of the Never-mind-what Theatre, to spend an hour at Kensington before sauntering in to Lady M———'s ball?

Why not, I ask, at least in the case of little Scoutbush? For Guardsman though he be, coming from a theatre and going to

a ball, there is meekness and humility in him at this moment, as well as in the average of the white-cravated gentlemen who trotted along that same pavement about eleven o'clock this forenoon. Why should not his white cravat, like theirs, be held symbolic of that fact? However, Scoutbush belongs rather to the former than the latter of Chaucer's categories; for a "smale foule" he is, a little bird-like fellow, who maketh melodie also, and warbles like a cock-robin; we cannot liken him to any more dignified songster. Moreover, he will sleep all night with open eye; for he will not be in bed till five to-morrow morning; and pricked he is, and that sorely, in his courage; for he is as much in love as his little nature can be, with the new actress, La Signora Cordifiamma, of the Never-mind-what Theatre.

How exquisitely, now (for this is one of the rare occasions in which a man is permitted to praise himself), is established hereby an unexpected bond of linked sweetness long drawn out between things which had, ere they came beneath the magic touch of genius, no more to do with each other than this book has with the Stock Exchange. Who would have dreamed of travelling from the Tabard in Southwark to the last new singer, *viâ* Exeter-hall and the lilies of the valley, and touching en passant on two cardinal virtues and an Irish Viscount? But see; given only a little impudence, and less logic, and hey presto! the thing is done; and all that remains to be done is to dilate (as the Rev. Dionysius C'Blareaway would do at this stage of the process) upon the moral question which has been so cunningly raised, and to inquire, firstly,—how the virtues of meekness and humility could be predicated of Frederick Augustus St. Just, Viscount Scoutbush and Baron Torytown, in the peerage of Ireland; and secondly,—how those virtues were called into special action by his questionably wise attachment to a new actress, to whom he had never spoken a word in his life.

First, then, "Little Freddy Scoutbush," as his compeers irreverently termed him, was, by common consent of her Majesty's Guards, a "good fellow." Whether the St. James' Street definition of that adjective be the perfect one or not, we will not stay to inquire; but in the Guards' club-house it meant this: that Scoutbush had not an enemy in the world, because he deserved none; that he lent, and borrowed not; gave, and asked not again; envied not; hustled not; slandered not; never bore malice, never said a cruel word, never played a dirty trick, would hear a fellow's troubles out to the end, and if he could not counsel, at least would not laugh at them, and at all times and in all places lived and let live, and was accordingly a general favourite. His morality was neither better nor

worse than the average of his companions; but if he was sensual, he was at least not base; and there were frail women who blessed "little Freddy," and his shy and secret generosity, from having saved them from the lowest pit.

Au reste, he was idle, frivolous, useless: but with these two palliating facts, that he knew it, and regretted it; and that he never had a chance of being aught else. His father and mother had died when he was a child. He had been sent to Eton at seven, where he learnt nothing, and into the Guards at seventeen, where he learnt less than nothing. His aunt, old lady Knockdown, who was a kind old Irish woman, an ex-blue and ex-beauty, now a high Evangelical professor, but as worldly as her neighbours in practice, had tried to make him a good boy in old times: but she had given him up, long before he left Eton, as a "vessel of wrath" (which he certainly was, with his hot Irish temper); and since then she had only spoken of him with moans, and to him just as if he and she had made a compact to be as worldly as they could, and as if the fact that he was going, as she used to tell her private friends, straight to the wrong place, was to be utterly ignored before the pressing reality of getting him and his sisters well married. And so it befel, that Lady Knockdown, like many more, having begun with too high (or at least precise) a spiritual standard, was forced to end practically in having no standard at all; and that for ten years of Scoutbush's life, neither she nor any other human being had spoken to him as if he had a soul to be saved, or any duty on earth save to eat, drink, and be merry.

And all the while there was a quaint and pathetic consciousness in the little man's heart that he was meant for something better; that he was no fool, and was not intended to be one. He would thrust his head into lectures at the Polytechnic and the British Institution, with a dim endeavour to guess what they were all about, and a good-natured envy of the clever fellows who knew about "science, and all that." He would sit and listen, puzzled and admiring, to the talk of statesmen, and confide his woe afterwards to some chum.—"Ah, if I had had the chance now that my cousin Chalkclere has! If I had had two or three tutors, and a good mother, too, keeping me in a coop, and cramming me with learning, as they cram chickens for the market, I fancy I could have shown my comb and hackles in the House as well as some of them. I fancy I could make a speech in parliament now, with the help of a little Irish impudence, if I only knew anything to speak about."

So Scoutbush clung, in a childish way, to any superior man who would take notice of him, and not treat him as the fribble which he seemed. He had taken to that well-known artist,

Claude Mellot, of late, simply from admiration of his brilliant talk about art and poetry; and boldly confessed that he preferred one of Mellot's orations on the sublime and beautiful, though he didn't understand a word of them, to the songs and jokes (very excellent ones in their way) of Mr. Hector Harkaway, the distinguished Irish novelist, and boon companion of her Majesty's Life Guards Green. His special intimate and Mentor, however, was a certain Major Campbell, of whom more hereafter; who, however, being a lofty-minded and perhaps somewhat Pharisaic person, made heavier demands on Scoutbush's conscience than he had yet been able to meet; for fully as he agreed that Hercules' choice between pleasure and virtue was the right one, still he could not yet follow that ancient hero along the thorny path, and confined his conception of "duty" to the minimum guard and drill. He had estates in Ireland, which had almost cleared themselves during his long minority, but which, since the famine, had cost him about as much as they brought him in; and estates in the West, which, with a Welsh slate-quarry, brought him in some seven or eight thousand a-year; and so kept his poor little head above water, to look pitifully round the universe, longing for the life of him to make out what it all meant, and hoping that somebody would come and tell him.

So much for his meekness and humility in general; as for the particular display of those virtues which he has shown to-day, it must be understood that he has given a promise to Mrs. Mellot not to make love to La Cordifiamma; and, on that only condition, has been allowed to meet her to-night at one of Claude Mellot's petits soupers.

La Cordifiamma has been staying, ever since she came to England, with the Mellots in the wilds of Brompton; unapproachable there, as in all other places. In public, she is a very Zenobia, who keeps all animals of the other sex at an awful distance; and of the fifty young puppies who are raving about her beauty, her air, and her voice, not one has obtained an introduction; while Claude, whose studio used to be a favourite lounge of young Guardsmen, has, as civilly as he can, closed his doors to those magnificent personages ever since the new singer became his guest.

Claude Mellot seems to have come in to a fortune of late years, large enough, at least, for his few wants. He paints no longer, save when he chooses; and has taken a little old house in one of those back lanes of Brompton, where islands of primæval nursery garden still remain undevoured by the advancing surges of the brick and mortar deluge. There he lives, happy in a green lawn, and windows opening thereon; in three elms, a cork, an

ilex, and a mulberry, with a great standard pear, for flower and foliage the queen of all suburban trees. There he lies on the lawn, upon strange skins, the summer's day, playing with cats and dogs, and making love to his Sabina, who has not lost her beauty in the least, though she is on the wrong side of five-and-thirty. He deludes himself, too, into the belief that he is doing something, because he is writing a treatise on the "Principles of Beauty;" which will be published, probably, about the time the Thames is purified, in the season of Latter Lammas and the Greek Kalends; and the more certainly so, because he has wandered into the abyss of conic sections and curves of double curvature, of which, if the truth must be spoken, he knows no more than his friends of the Life Guards Green.

To this charming little nest has Lord Scoutbush procured an evening's admission after abject supplication to Sabina, who pets him because he is musical, and solemn promises neither to talk or look any manner of foolishness.

"My dearest Mrs. Mellot," says the poor wretch, "I will be good, indeed I will; I will not even speak to her. Only let me sit and look,—and—and,—why, I thought you understood all about such things, and could pity a poor fellow who was spoony."

And Sabina, who prides herself much on understanding such things, and on having, indeed, reduced them to a science in which she gives gratuitous lessons to all young gentlemen and ladies of her acquaintance, receives him pityingly, in that delicious little back drawing-room, whither whosoever enters is in no hurry to go out again.

Claude's house is arranged with his usual defiance of all conventionalities. Dining or drawing-room proper there is none; the large front room is the studio, where he and Sabina eat and drink, as well as work and paint: but out of it opens a little room, the walls of which are so covered with gems of art (where the rogue finds money to buy them is a puzzle), that the eye can turn nowhere without taking in some new beauty, and wandering on from picture to statue, from portrait to landscape, dreaming and learning afresh after every glance. At the back, a glass bay has been thrown out, and forms a little conservatory, for ever fresh and gay with tropic ferns and flowers; gaudy orchids dangle from the roof, creepers hide the frame-work, and you hardly see where the room ends, and the winter-garden begins; and in the centre an ottoman invites you to lounge. It costs Claude money, doubtless; but he has his excuse,—"Having once seen the tropics, I cannot live without some love-tokens from their lost paradises; and which is the wiser plan, to spend money on a horse and brougham, which we don't care to use,

and on scrambling into society at the price of one great stupid party a year, or to make our little world as pretty as we can, and let those who wish to see us, take us as they find us?"

In this "nest," as Claude and Sabina call it, sacred to the everlasting billing and cooing of that sweet little pair of human love-birds who have built it, was supper set. La Cordifiamma, all the more beautiful from the languor produced by the excitement of acting, lay upon a sofa; Claude attended, talking earnestly; Sabina, according to her custom, was fluttering in and out, and arranging supper with her own hands; both husband and wife were as busy as bees; and yet any one accustomed to watch the little ins and outs of married life, could have seen that neither forgot for a moment that the other was in the room, but basked and purred, like two blissful cats, each in the sunshine of the other's presence; and he could have seen, too, that La Cordifiamma was divining their thoughts, and studying all their little expressions, perhaps that she might use them on the stage; perhaps, too, happy in sympathy with their happiness: and yet there was a shade of sadness on her forehead.

Scoutbush enters, is introduced, and receives a salutation from the actress haughty and cold enough to check the forwardest; puts on the air of languid nonchalance which is considered (or was before the little experiences of the Crimea) fit and proper for young gentlemen of rank and fashion. So he sits down, and feasts his foolish eyes upon his idol, hoping for a few words before the evening is over. Did I not say well, then, that there was as much meekness and humility under Scoutbush's white cravat as under others? But his little joy is soon dashed; for the black boy announces (seemingly much to his own pleasure) a tall personage, whom, from his dress and his moustachio, Scoutbush takes for a Frenchman, till he hears him called Stangrave. The intruder is introduced to Lord Scoutbush, which ceremony is consummated by a microscopic nod on either side; he then walks straight up to La Cordifiamma; and Scoutbush sees her cheeks flush as he does so. He takes her hand, speaks to her in a low voice, and sits down by her, Claude making room for him; and the two engage earnestly in conversation.

Scoutbush is much inclined to walk out of the room;—was he brought there to see that? Of course, however, he sits still, keeps his own counsel, and makes himself agreeable enough all the evening, like a good-natured kind-hearted little man, as he is. Whereby he is repaid; for the conversation soon becomes deep, and even too deep for him; and he is fain to drop out of the race, and leave it to his idol and to the new-comer, who seems to have seen, and done, and read everything in heaven and earth, and probably bought everything also; not to mention that

he would be happy to sell the said universe again, at a very cheap price, if any one would kindly take it off his hands. Not that he boasts, or takes any undue share of the conversation; he is evidently too well bred for that; but every sentence shows an acquaintance with facts of which Eton has told Scoutbush nothing, the barrack-room less, and after which he still craves, the good little fellow, in a very honest way, and would soon have learnt, had he had a chance; for of native Irish smartness he had no lack.

"Poor Flake was half mad about you, Signora, in the stage-box to-night," said Sabina. "He says that he shall not sleep till he has painted you."

"Do let him!" cried Scoutbush: "what a picture he will make!"

"He may paint a picture, but not me; it is quite enough, Lord Scoutbush, to be some one else for two hours every night, without going down to posterity, as some one else for ever. If I am painted, I will be painted by no one who cannot represent my very self."

"You are right!" said Stangrave: "and you will do the man himself good by refusing; he has some notion still of what a portrait ought to be. If he once begins by attempting passing expressions of passion, which is all stage portraits can give, he will find them so much easier than honest representations of character, that he will end, where all our moderns seem to do, in merest melodrama."

"Explain!" said she.

"Portrait painters now depend for their effect on the mere accidents of the *entourage;* on dress, on landscape, even on broad hints of a man's occupation, putting a plan on the engineer's table, and a roll in the statesman's hands, like the old Greek who wrote 'this is an ox' under his picture. If they wish to give the face expression, though they seldom aim so high, all they can compass is a passing emotion; and one sitter goes down to posterity with an eternal frown, another with an eternal smile."

"Or, if he be a poet," said Sabina, "rolls his eye for ever in a fine frenzy."

"But would you forbid them to paint passion?"

"Not in its place; when the picture gives the causes of the passion, and the scene tells its own story. But then let us not have merely Kean as Hamlet, but Hamlet's self; let the painter sit down and conceive for himself a Hamlet, such as Shakspeare conceived; not merely give us as much of him as could be pressed at a given moment into the face of Mr. Kean. He will be only unjust to both actor and character. If Flake paints Marie as

Lady Macbeth, he will give us neither her nor Lady Macbeth; but only the single point at which their two characters can coincide."

"How rude!" said Sabina, laughing; "what is he doing but hinting that La Signora's conception of Lady Macbeth is a very partial and imperfect one?"

"And why should it not be?" asked the actress, humbly enough.

"I meant," he answered, warmly, "that there was more, far more in her than in any character which she assumes; and I do not want a painter to copy only one aspect, and let a part go down to posterity as a representation of the whole."

"If you mean that, you shall be forgiven. No; when she is painted, she shall be painted as herself, as she is now. Claude shall paint her."

"I have not known La Signora long enough," said Claude, "to aspire to such an honour. I paint no face which I have not studied for a year."

"Faith!" said Scoutbush, "you would find no more in most faces at the year's end, than you did the first day."

"Then I would not paint them. If I paint a portrait, which I seldom do, I wish to make it such a one as the old masters aimed at,—to give the sum total of the whole character; traces of every emotion, if it were possible, and glances of every expression which have passed over it since it was born into the world. They are all here, the whole past and future of the man; and every man, as the Mohammedans say, carries his destiny on his forehead."

"But who has eyes to see it?"

"The old masters had; some of them at least. Raphael had; Sebastian del Piombo had, and Titian, and Giorgione. There are portraits painted by them which carry a whole life-history concentrated into one moment."

"But they," said Stangrave, "are the portraits of men such as they saw around them; natures who were strong for good and evil, who were not ashamed to show their strength. Where will a painter find such among the poor, thin, unable mortals who come to him to buy immortality at a hundred and fifty guineas apiece, after having spent their lives in religiously rubbing off their angles against each other, and forming their characters, as you form shot, by shaking them together in a bag till they have polished each other into dullest uniformity?"

"It's very true," said Scoutbush, who suffered much at times from a certain wild Irish vein, which stirred him up to kick over the traces. "People are horribly like each other; and if a poor fellow is bored, and tries to do anything spicy or original, he

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has half-a-dozen people pooh-poohing him down on the score of bad taste."

"Men can be just as original now as ever," said La Signora, "if they had but the courage, even the insight. Heroic souls in old times had no more opportunities than we have: but they used them. There were daring deeds to be done then—are there none now? Sacrifices to be made—are there none now? Wrongs to be redressed—are there none now? Let any one set his heart, in these days, to do what is right, and nothing else; and it will not be long ere his brow is stamped with all that goes to make up the heroical expression—with noble indignation, noble self-restraint, great hopes, great sorrows; perhaps, even, with the print of the martyr's crown of thorns."

She looked at Stangrave as she spoke, with an expression which Scoutbush tried in vain to read. The American made no answer, and seemed to hang his head awhile. After a minute he said tenderly:—

"You will tire yourself if you talk thus, after the evening's fatigue. Mrs. Mellot will sing to us, and give us leisure to think over our lesson."

And Sabina sang; and then Lord Scoutbush was made to sing; and sang his best, no doubt.

So the evening slipt on, till it was past eleven o'clock, and Stangrave rose. "And now," said he, "I must go to Lady M——'s ball; and Marie must rest."

As he went, he just leaned over La Cordifiamma.

"Shall I come in to-morrow morning? We ought to read over that scene together before the rehearsal."

"Early then, or Sabina will be gone out; and she must play soubrette to our hero and heroine."

"You will rest? Mrs. Mellot, you will see that she does not sit up."

"It is not very polite to rob us of her, as soon as you cannot enjoy her yourself."

"I must take care of people who do not take care of themselves;" and Stangrave departed.

Great was Scoutbush's wrath when he saw Marie rise and obey orders. "Who was this man? what right had he to command her?"

He asked as much of Sabina the moment La Cordifiamma had retired.

"Are you not going to Lady M——'s, too?"

"No; that is, I won't go yet; not till you have explained all this to me."

"Explained what?" asked Sabina, looking as demure as a little brown mouse.

"Why, what did you ask me here for?"

"Lord Scoutbush should recollect that he asked himself."

"You cruel venomous creature! do you think I would have come, if I had known that I was to see another man making love to her before my very eyes? I could kill the fellow;—who is he?"

"A New York merchant, unworthy of your aristocratic powder and ball."

"The confounded Yankee!" muttered Scoutbush.

"If people swear in my house, I fine them a dozen of kid-gloves. Did you not promise me that you would not make love to her yourself."

"Well—but, it is too cruel of you, before my very eyes."

"I saw no love-making to-night."

"None? Were you blind?"

"Not in the least; but you cannot well see a thing making which has been made long ago,"

"What! Is he her husband?"

"No."

"Engaged to her?"

"No."

"What then!"

"Don't you know already that this is a house of mystery, full of mysterious people? I tell you this only, that if she ever marries any one, she will marry him; and that if I can, I will make her."

"Then you are my enemy after all."

"I! Do you think that Sabina Mellot can see a young viscount loose upon the universe, without trying to make up a match for him? No; I have such a prize for you,—young, handsome, better educated than any woman whom you will meet to-night. True, she is a Manchester girl: but then she has eighty thousand pounds."

"Eighty thousand nonsense? I'd sooner have that divine creature without a penny, than—"

"And would my lord viscount so far debase himself as to marry an actress?"

"Humph! Faith, my grandmother was an actress; and we St. Justs are none the worse for that fact, as far as I can see,—and certainly none the uglier—the women at least. Oh Sabina—Mrs. Mellot, I mean—only help me this once!"

"This once? Do you intend to marry by my assistance this time, and by your own the next? How many viscountesses are there to be?"

"Don't laugh at me, you cruel woman: you don't know; you fancy that I am not in love—" and the poor fellow began pouring

out these common-places, which one has heard too often to take the trouble of repeating, and yet which are real enough, and pathetic too; for in every man, however frivolous, or even worthless, love calls up to the surface the real heroism, the real depth of character—all the more deep because common to poet and philosopher, guardsman and country clod.

"I'll leave town to-morrow. I'll go to the Land's-end,—to Norway,—to Africa—"

"And forget her in the bliss of lion-hunting."

"Don't, I tell you; here I will not stay to be driven mad. To think that she is here, and that hateful Yankee at her elbow. I'll go—"

"To Lady M——'s ball?"

"No, confound it; to meet that fellow there! I should quarrel with him, as sure as there is hot Irish blood in my veins. The self-satisfied puppy! to be flirting and strutting there, while such a creature as that is lying thinking of him."

"Would you have him shut himself up in his hotel, and write poetry; or walk the streets all night, sighing at the moon?"

"No; but the cool way in which he went off himself, and sent her to bed. Confound him! commanding her. It made my blood boil."

"Claude, get Lord Scoutbush some iced soda-water."

"If you laugh at me, I'll never speak to you again."

"Or buy any of Claude's pictures?"

"Why do you torment me so? I'll go, I say,—leave town to-morrow,—only I can't with this horrid depôt work! What shall I do? It's too cruel of you, while Campbell is away in Ireland, too; and I have not a soul but you to ask advice of, for Valencia is as great a goose as I am;" and the poor little fellow buried his hands in his curls, and stared fiercely into the fire, as if to draw from thence omens of his love, by the spodomantic augury of the ancient Greeks; while Sabina tripped up and down the room, putting things to rights for the night, and enjoying his torments as a cat does those of the mouse between her paws; and yet not out of spite, but from pure and simple fun.

Sabina is one of those charming bodies who knows everybody's business, and manages it. She lives in a world of intrigue, but without a thought of intriguing for her own benefit. She has always a match to make, a disconsolate lover to comfort, a young artist to bring forward, a refugee to conceal, a spendthrift to get out of a scrape; and, like David in the mountains, "every one that is discontented, and every one that is in debt, gather themselves to her." The strangest people, on the strangest errands, run over each other in that cosy little nest of hers. Fine ladies

with over-full hearts, and seedy gentlemen with over-empty pockets, jostle each other at her door; and she has a smile, and a repartee, and good, cunning, practical wisdom for each and every one of them, and then dismisses them to bill and coo with Claude, and laugh over everybody and everything. The only price which she demands for her services is, to be allowed to laugh; and if that be permitted, she will be as busy, and earnest, and tender, as Saint Elizabeth herself. "I have no children of my own," she says, "so I just make everybody my children, Claude included; and play with them, and laugh at them, and pet them, and help them out of their scrapes, just as I should if they were in my own nursery." And so it befalls that she is every one's confidant; and though every one seems on the point of taking liberties with her, yet no one does; partly because they are in her power, and partly because, like an Eastern sultana, she carries a poniard, and can use it, though only in self-defence. So, if great people, or small people either, (who can give themselves airs as well as their betters,) take her plain speaking unkindly, she just speaks a little more plainly, once for all, and goes off smiling to some one else; as a hummingbird, if a flower has no honey in it, whirs away, with a saucy flirt of its pretty little tail, to the next branch on the bush.

I must know more of this American," said Scoutbush, at last.

"Well, he would be very improving company for you; and I know you like improving company."

"I mean—what has he to do with her?"

"That is just what I will not tell you. One thing I will tell you, though, for it may help to quench any vain hopes on your part; and that is, the reason which she gives for not marrying him."

"Well?"

"Because he is an idler."

"What would she say of me, then?" groaned Scoutbush.

"Very true; for, you must understand, this Mr. Stangrave is not what you or I should call an idle man. He has travelled over half the world, and made the best use of his eyes. He has filled his house in New York, they say, with gems of art gathered from every country in Europe. He is a finished scholar; talks half-a-dozen different languages, sings, draws, writes poetry, reads hard every day, at every subject, from gardening to German metaphysics—altogether, one of the most highly cultivated men I know, and quite an Admirable Crichton in his way."

"Then why does she call him an idler?"

"Because, she says, he has no great purpose in life. She will marry no one who will not devote himself, and all he has, to some great, chivalrous, heroic enterprise; whose one object is to

be of use, even if he has to sacrifice his life to it. She says that there must be such men still left in the world; and that if she finds one, him she will marry, and no one else."

"Why, there are none such to be found now-a-days, I thought?"

"You heard what she herself said on that very point."

There was a silence for a minute or two. Scoutbush had heard, and was pondering it in his heart. At last,—

"I am not cut out for a hero; so I suppose I must give her up. But I wish sometimes I could be of use, Mrs. Mellot: but what can a fellow do?"

"I thought there was an Irish tenantry to be looked after, my lord, and a Cornish tenantry too."

"That's what Campbell is always saying: but what more can I do than I do? As for those poor Paddies, I never ask them for rent; if I did, I should not get it; so there is no generosity in that. And as for the Aberalva people, they have got on very well without me for twenty years; and I don't know them, nor what they want; nor even if they do want anything, except fish enough, and I can't put more fish into the sea, Mrs. Mellot?"

"Try and be a good soldier, then," said she, laughing. "Why should not Lord Scoutbush emulate his illustrious countryman, conquer at a second Waterloo, and die a duke?"

"I'm not cut out for a general, I am afraid; but if—I don't say if I could marry that woman—I suppose it would be a foolish thing—though I shall break my heart, I believe, if I do not. Oh, Mrs. Mellot, you cannot tell what a fool I have made myself about her; and I cannot help it! It's not her beauty merely; but there is something so noble in her face, like one of those Greek goddesses Claude talks of; and when she is acting, if she has to say anything grand, or generous—or—you know the sort of thing,—she brings it out with such a voice, and such a look, from the very bottom of her heart,—it makes me shudder; just as she did when she told that Yankee, that every one could be a hero, or a martyr, if he chose. Mrs. Mellot, I am sure she is one, or she could not look and speak as she does."

"She is one!" said Sabina; "a heroine, and a martyr too."

"If I could,—that was what I was going to say,—if I could but win that woman's respect—as I live, I ask no more; only to be sure she didn't despise me. I'd do—I don't know what I wouldn't do. I'd—I'd study the art of war: I know there are books about it. I'd get out to the East, away from this depôt work; and if there is no fighting there, as every one says there will not be, I'd go into a marching regiment, and see service. I'd,—hang it, if they'd have me,—I'd even go to the senior department at Sandhurst, and read mathematics!"

Sabina kept her countenance (though with difficulty) at this magnificent bathos; for she saw that the little man was really in earnest; and that the looks and words of the strange actress had awakened in him something far deeper and nobler than the mere sensual passion of a boy.

"Ah, if I had but gone out to Varna with the rest! I thought myself a lucky fellow to be left here."

"Do you know that it is getting very late?"

So Frederick Lord Scoutbush went home to his rooms; and there sat for three hours and more with his feet on the fender, rejecting the entreaties of Mr. Bowie, his servant, either to have something, or to go to bed; yea, he forgot even to smoke, by which Mr. Bowie "jaloused" that he was hit very hard indeed: but made no remark, being a Scotchman, and of a cautious temperament.

However, from that night Scoutbush was a changed man, and tried to be so. He read of nothing but sieges and stockades, brigade evolutions, and conical bullets; he drilled his men till he was an abomination in their eyes, and a weariness to their flesh; only every evening he went to the theatre, watched La Cordifiamma with a heavy heart, and then went home to bed; for the little man had good sense enough to ask Sabina for no more interviews with her. So in all things he acquitted himself as a model officer, and excited the admiration and respect of Serjeant-Major MacArthur, who began fishing at Bowie to discover the cause of this strange metamorphosis in the rackety little Irishman.

"Your master seems to be qualifying himself for the adjutant's post, Mr. Bowie. I'm jalousing he's fired with martial ardour since the war broke out."

To which Bowie, being a brother Scot, answered Scottice, by a crafty paralogism.

"I've always held it as my opeeeenion, that his lordship is a youth of very good parts, if he was only compelled to employ them."

CHAPTER VIII

TAKING ROOT.

Whosoever enjoys the sight of an honest man doing his work well, would have enjoyed the sight of Tom Thurnall for the next two months. In-doors all the morning, and out of doors all the afternoon, was that shrewd and good-natured visage, calling up an answering smile on every face, and leaving every heart a little

lighter than he found it. Puzzling enough it was, alike to Heale and to Headley, how Tom contrived, as if by magic, to gain every one's good word—their own included. For Frank, in spite of Tom's questionable opinions, had already made all but a confidant of the Doctor; and Heale, in spite of envy and suspicion, could not deny that the young man was a very valuable young man, if he wasn't given so much to those new-fangled notions of the profession.

By which term Heale indicated the, to him, astounding fact, that Tom charged the patients as little, instead of as much as possible, and applying to medicine the principles of an enlightened political economy, tried to increase the demand by cheapening the supply.

"Which is revolutionary doctrine, Sir," said Heale to Lieutenant Jones, over the brandy-and-water, "and just like what the Cobden and Bright lot used to talk, and have been the ruin of British agriculture, though don't say I said so, because of my Lord Minchampstead. But, conceive my feelings, Sir, as the father of a family, who have my bread to earn, this very morning. —In comes old Dame Penaluna (which is good pay I know, and has two hundred and more out on a merchant brig) for something; and what was my feelings, Sir, to hear this young party deliver himself—'Well, ma'am,' says he, as I am a living man, 'I can cure you, if you like, with a dozen bottles of lotion, at eighteenpence a-piece; but if you'll take my advice, you'll buy two pennyworth of alum down street, do what I tell you with it, and cure yourself.' It's robbery, Sir, I say, all these out-of-the-way cheap dodges, which arn't in the pharmacopœia, half of them; it's unprofessional, Sir—quackery."

"Tell you what, Doctor, robbery or none, I'll go to him tomorrow, d'ye see, if I live as long, for this old ailment of mine. I never told you of it, old pill and potion, for fear of a swinging bill: but just grinned and bore it, d'ye see."

"There it is again," cries Heale in despair. "He'll ruin me."

"No, he won't, and you know it."

"What d'ye think he served me last week? A young chap comes in, consumptive, he said, and I dare say he's right—he is uncommonly 'cute about what he calls diagnosis. Says he, 'You ought to try Carrageen moss. It's an old drug, but it's a good one.' There was a drawer full of it to his hand; had been lying there any time this ten years. I go to open it: but what was my feelings when he goes on, as cool as a cucumber—'And there's bushels of it here,' says he, 'on every rock; so if you'll come down with me at low tide this afternoon, I'll show you the trade, and tell you how to boil it.' I thought I should have knocked him down."

"But you didn't," said Jones, laughing in every muscle of his body. "Tell you what, Doctor, you've got a treasure; he's just getting back your custom, d'ye see, and when he's done that, he'll lay on the bills sharp enough. Why, I hear he's up at Mrs. Vavasour's every day."

"And not ten shillings' worth of medicine sent up to the house any week."

"He charges for his visits, I suppose."

"Not he! If you'll believe me, when I asked him if he wasn't going to, he says, says he, that Mrs. Vavasour's company was quite payment enough for him."

"Shows his good taste. Why, what now, Mary?" as the maid opens the door.

"Mr. Thurnall wants Mr. Heale."

"Always wanting me," groans Heale, hugging his glass, "driving me about like any negro slave. Tell him to come in."

"Here, Doctor," says the Lieutenant, "I want you to prescribe for me, if you'll do it gratis, d'ye see. Take some brandy and water."

"Good advice costs nothing," says Tom, filling; "Mr. Heale, read that letter."

And the Lieutenant details his ailments, and their supposed cause, till Heale has the pleasure of hearing Tom answer—

"Fiddlesticks! That's not what's the matter with you. I'll cure you for half-a-crown, and toss you up double or quits."

"Oh!" groans Heale, as he spells away over the letter,—

"Lord Minchampstead having been informed by Mr. Armsworth that Mr. Thurnall is now in the neighbourhood of his estates of Pentremochyn, would feel obliged to him at his earliest convenience to examine into the sanitary state of the cottages thereon, which are said to be much haunted by typhus and other epidemics, and to send him a detailed report, indicating what he thinks necessary for making them thoroughly healthy. Mr. Thurnall will be so good as to make his own charge."

"Well, Mr. Thurnall, you ought to turn a good penny by this," said Heale, half envious of Tom's connexion, half contemptuous at his supposed indifference to gain.

"I'll charge what it's worth," said Tom. "Meanwhile, I hope you're going to see Miss Beer to-night."

"Couldn't you just go yourself, my dear Sir? It is so late."

"No; I never go near young women. I told you so at first, and I stick to my rule. You'd better go, Sir, on my word, or if she's dead before morning, don't say it's my fault."

"Did you ever hear a poor old man so tyrannized over?" said Heale, as Tom coolly went into the passage, brought in the old

man's great coat and hat, arrayed him and marched him out, civilly, but firmly.

"Now, Lieutenant, I've half an hour to spare; let's have a jolly chat about the West Indies."

And Tom began with anecdote and joke, and the old seaman laughed till he cried, and went to bed vowing that there never was such a pleasant fellow on earth, and he ought to be physician to Queen Victoria.

Up at five the next morning, the indefatigable Tom had all his work done by ten; and was preparing to start for Pentremochyn, ere Heale was out of bed, when a customer came in who kept him half an hour.

He was a tall broad-shouldered young man, with a red face, protruding bull's eyes, and a moustachio. He was dressed in a complete suit of pink and white plaid, cut jauntily enough. A bright blue cap, a thick gold watch-chain, three or four large rings, a dog-whistle from his button-hole, a fancy cane in his hand, and a little Oxford meerschaum in his mouth, completed his equipment. He lounged in, with an air of careless superiority, while Tom, who was behind the counter, cutting up his day's provision of honey-dew, eyed him curiously.

"Who are you, now? A gentleman? Not quite, I guess. Some squireen of the parts adjacent, and look in somewhat of a crapulocomatose state moreover. I wonder if you are the great Trebooze of Trebooze."

"I say," yawned the young gentleman, "where's old Heale?" and an oath followed the speech, as it did every other one herein recorded.

"The playing half of old Heale is in bed, and I'm his working half. Can I do anything for you?"

"Cool fish," thought the customer. "I say—what have you got there?"

"Australian honey-dew. Did you ever smoke it?"

"I've heard of it; let's see:" and Mr. Trebooze—for it was he—put his hand across the counter unceremoniously, and clawed up some.

"Didn't know you sold tobacco here. Prime stuff. Too strong for me, though, this morning, somehow."

"Ah? A little too much claret last night? I thought so. We'll set that right in five minutes."

"Eh? How did you guess that?" asked Trebooze, with a larger oath than usual.

"Oh, we doctors are men of the world," said Tom, in a cheerful and insinuating tone, as he mixed his man a draught.

"You doctors? You're a cock of a different hackle from old Heale, then"

"I trust so," said Tom.

"By George, I feel better already. I say, you're a trump; I suppose you're Heale's new partner, the man who was washed ashore?"

Tom nodded assent.

"I say—How do you sell that honey-dew?"

"I don't sell it; I'll give you as much as you like, only you shan't smoke it till after dinner."

"Shan't?" said Trebooze, testy and proud.

"Not with my leave, or you'll be complaining two hours hence that I'm a humbug, and have done you no good. Get on your horse, and have four hours' gallop on the downs, and you'll feel like a buffalo bull by two o'clock."

Trebooze looked at him with a stupid curiosity and a little awe. He saw that Tom's cool self-possession was not meant for impudence; and something in his tone and manner told him that the boast of being "a man of the world" was not untrue. And of all kinds of men, a man of the world was the man of whom Trebooze stood most in awe. A small squireen, cursed with six or seven hundreds a year of his own, never sent to school, college, or into the army, he had grown up in a narrow circle of squireens like himself, without an object save that of gratifying his animal passions; and had about six years before, being then just of age, settled in life by marrying his housemaid—the only wise thing, perhaps, he ever did. For she, a clever and determined woman, kept him, though not from drunkenness and debt, at least from delirium tremens and ruin, and was, in her rough, vulgar way, his guardian angel—such a one at least, as he was worthy of. More than once has one seen the same seeming folly turn out in practice as wise a step as could well have been taken; and the coarse nature of the man, which would have crushed and ill-used a delicate and high-minded wife, subdued to something like decency by a help literally meet for it.

There was a pause. Trebooze fancied, and wisely, that the Doctor was a cleverer man than he, and of course would want to show it. So, after the fashion of a country squireen, he felt a longing to "set him down." "He's been a traveller, they say," thought he in that pugnacious, sceptical spirit which is bred, not, as twaddlers fancy, by too extended knowledge, but by the sense of ignorance, and a narrow sphere of thought, which makes a man angry and envious of any one who has seen more than he.

"Buffalo bulls?" said he, half contemptuously; "what do you know about buffalo bulls?"

"I was one once myself," said Tom, "where I lived before."

Trebooze swore. "Don't you put your traveller's lies on me, Sir."

"Well, perhaps I dreamt it," said Tom, placidly; "I remember I dreamt at the same time that you were a grizzly bear, fourteen feet long, and wanted to eat me up: but you found me too tough about the hump ribs."

Trebooze stared at his audacity.

"You're a rum hand."

To which Tom made answer in the same elegant strain; and then began a regular word-battle of slang, in which Tom showed himself so really witty a proficient, that Mr. Trebooze laughed himself into good-humour, and ended by—

"I say, you're a good fellow, and I think you and I shall suit."

Tom had his doubts, but did not express them.

"Come up this afternoon and see my child; Mrs. Trebooze thinks it's got swelled glands, or some such woman's nonsense. Bother them, why can't they let the child alone, fussing and doctoring: and she will have you. Heard of you from Mrs. Vavasour, I believe. Our doctor and I have quarrelled, and she said, if I could get you, she'd sooner have you than that old rum-puncheon Heale. And then, you'd better stop and take pot-luck, and we'll make a night of it."

"I have to go round Lord Minchampstead's estates, and will take you on my way: but I'm afraid I shall be too dirty to have the pleasure of dining with Mrs. Trebooze coming back."

"Mrs. Trebooze! She must take what I like; and what's good enough for me is good enough for her, I hope. Come as you are—Liberty-hall at Trebooze;" and out he swaggered.

"Does he bully her?" thought Tom, "or is he hen-pecked, and wants to hide it? I'll see to-night, and play my cards accordingly."

All which Miss Heale had heard. She had been peeping and listening at the glass-door, and her mother also; for no sooner had Trebooze entered the shop, than she had run off to tell her mother the surprising fact, Trebooze's custom having been, for some years past, courted in vain by Heale. So Miss Heale peeped and peeped at a man whom she regarded with delighted curiosity, because he bore the reputation of being "such a naughty wicked man!" and "so very handsome too, and so distinguished as he looks!" said the poor little fool, to whose novel-fed imagination Mr. Trebooze was an ideal Lothario.

But the surprise of the two dames grew rapidly as they heard Tom's audacity towards the country aristocrat.

"Impudent wretch!" moaned Mrs. Heale to herself. "He'd drive away an angel if he came into the shop."

"Oh, Ma! hear how they are going on now."

"I can't bear it, my dear. This man will be the ruin of us. His manners are those of the pot-house, when the cloven foot is shown, which it's his nature as a child of wrath, and we can't expect otherwise."

"Oh, Ma! do you hear that Mr. Trebooze has asked him to dinner?"

"Nonsense!"

But it was true.

"Well! if there ain't the signs of the end of the world, which is? All the years your poor father has been here, and never so much as send him a hare, and now this young penniless interloper; and he to dine at Trebooze off purple and fine linen."

"There is not much of that there, Ma; I'm sure they are poor enough, for all his pride; and as for her—"

"Yes, my dear; and as for her, though we haven't married squires, my dear, yet we haven't been squire's housemaids, and have adorned our own station, which was good enough for us, and has no need to rise out of it, nor ride on Pharaoh's chariot-wheels after filthy lucre—"

Miss Heale hated poor Mrs. Trebooze with a bitter hatred, because she dreamed insanely that, but for her, she might have secured Mr. Trebooze for herself. And though her ambition was now transferred to the unconscious Tom, that need not make any difference in the said amiable feeling.

But that Tom was a most wonderful person, she had no doubt. He had conquered her heart—so she informed herself passionately again and again; as was very necessary, seeing that the passion, having no real life of its own, required a good deal of blowing to keep it alight. Yes, he had conquered her heart, and he was conquering all hearts likewise. There must be some mystery about him—there should be. And she settled in her novel-bewildered brain, that Tom must be a nobleman in disguise—probably a foreign prince, exiled for political offences. Bah! perhaps too many lines have been spent on the poor little fool; but as such fools exist, and people must be as they are, there is no harm in drawing her; and in asking, too—Who will help those young girls of the middle class who, like Miss Heale, are often really less educated than the children of their parents' workmen; sedentary, luxurious, full of petty vanity, gossip, and intrigue, without work, without purpose, except that of getting married to any one who will ask them—bewildering brain and heart with novels, which, after all, one hardly grudges them; for what other means have they of learning that there is any fairer, nobler life possible, at least on earth, than that of the sordid money-getting, often the sordid puffery and adulteration, which is the

atmosphere of their home? Exceptions there are, in thousands, doubtless; and the families of the great city tradesmen stand, of course, on far higher ground, and are often far better educated, and more high-minded, than the fine ladies, their parents' customers. But, till some better plan of education than the boarding-school is devised for them; till our towns shall see something like in kind to, though sounder and soberer in quality than, the high schools of America; till in country villages the ladies who interest themselves about the poor will recollect that the farmers' and tradesmen's daughters are just as much in want of their influence as the charity children, and will yield a far richer return for their labour, though the one need not interfere with the other; so long will England be full of Miss Heales; fated, when they marry, to bring up sons and daughters as sordid and unwholesome as their mothers.

Tom worked all that day in and out of the Pentremochyn cottages, noting down nuisances and dilapidations: but his head was full of other thoughts; for he had received, the evening before, news which was to him very important, for more reasons than one. The longer he stayed at Aberalva, the longer he felt inclined to stay. The strange attraction of Grace had, as we have seen, something to do with his purpose: but he saw, too, a good opening for one of those country practices, in which he seemed more and more likely to end. At his native Whitbury, he knew, there was no room for a fresh medical man; and gradually he was making up his mind to settle at Aberalva; to buy out Heale, either with his own money (if he recovered it), or with money borrowed from Mark; to bring his father down to live with him, and in that pleasant wild western place, fold his wings after all his wanderings. And therefore certain news which he had obtained the night before was very valuable to him, in that it put a fresh person into his power, and might, if cunningly used, give him a hold upon the ruling family of the place, and on Lord Scoutbush himself. He had found out that Lucia and Elsley were unhappy together; and found out, too, a little more than was there to find. He could not, of course, be a month among the gossips of Aberalva, without hearing hints that the great folks at the court did not always keep their tempers; for, of family jars, as of everything else on earth, the great and just law stands true:—"What you do in the closet, shall be proclaimed on the housetop."

But the gossips of Aberalva, as women are too often wont to do, had altogether taken the man's side in the quarrel. The reason was, I suppose, that Lucia, conscious of having fallen somewhat in rank, "held up her head" to Mrs. Trebooze and Mrs. Heale (as they themselves expressed it), and to various

other little notabilities of the neighbourhood, rather more than she would have done had she married a man of her own class, She was afraid that they might boast of being intimate with her; that they might take to advising and patronising her as an inexperienced young creature; afraid, even, that she might be tempted, in some unguarded moment, to gossip with them, confide her unhappiness to them, in the blind longing to open her heart to some human being; for there were no resident gentry of her own rank in the neighbourhood. She was too high-minded to complain much to Clara; and her sister Valencia was the very last person to whom she would confess that her run-away-match had not been altogether successful. So she lived alone and friendless, shrinking into herself more and more, while the vulgar women round mistook her honour for pride, and revenged themselves accordingly. She was an uninteresting fine lady, proud and cross, and Elsley was a martyr. "So handsome and agreeable as he was—(and to do him justice, he was the former, and he could be the latter when he chose)—to be tied to that unsociable, stuck-up woman;" and so forth.

All which Tom had heard, and formed his own opinion thereof; which was,—

"All very fine: but I flatter myself I know a little what women are made of; and this I know, that where man and wife quarrel, even if she ends the battle, it is he who has begun it. I never saw a case yet where the man was not the most in fault; and I'll lay my life John Briggs has led her a pretty life: what else could one expect of him?"

However, he held his tongue, and kept his eyes open withal whenever he went up to Penalva Court, which he had to do very often; for though he had cured the children of their ailments, yet Mrs. Vavasour was perpetually, more or less, unwell, and he could not cure her. Her low spirits, head-aches, general want of tone and vitality, puzzled him at first; and would have puzzled him longer, had he not settled with himself that their cause was to be sought in the mind, and not in the body; and at last, gaining courage from certainty, he had hinted as much to Miss Clara the night before, when she came down (as she was very fond of doing) to have a gossip with him in his shop, under the pretence of fetching medicine.

"I don't think I shall send Mrs. Vavasour any more, Miss Clara. There is no use running up a long bill while I do no good; and, what is more, suspect that I can do none, poor lady." And he gave the girl a look which seemed to say, "You had better tell me the truth; for I know everything already."

To which Clara answered by trying to find out how much he did know: but Tom was a cunninger diplomatist than she; and

in ten minutes, after having given solemn promises of secresy, and having, by strong expressions of contempt for Mrs. Heale and the village gossips, made Clara understand that he did not at all take their view of the case, he had poured out to him across the counter all Clara's long-pent indignation and contempt.

"I never said a word of this to a living soul, Sir; I was too proud, for my mistress's sake, to let vulgar people know what we suffered. We don't want any of their pity indeed; but you, Sir, who have the feelings of a gentleman, and know what the world is, like ourselves—"

"Take care," whispered Tom; "that daughter of Heale's may be listening."

"I'd pull her hair about her ears if I caught her!" quoth Clara; and then ran on to tell how Elsley "never kept no hours, nor no accounts either; so that she has to do everything, poor thing; and no thanks either. And never knows when he'll dine, or when he'll breakfast, or when he'll be in, wandering in and out like a madman; and sits up all night, writing his nonsense. And she'll go down twice and three times a night in the cold, poor dear, to see if he's fallen asleep; and gets abused like a pickpocket for her pains (which was an exaggeration); and lies in bed all the morning, looking at the flies, and calls after her if his shoes want tying, or his finger aches; as helpless as the babe unborn; and will never do nothing useful himself, not even to hang a picture or move a chair, and grumbles at her if he sees her doing anything, because she ain't listening to his prosodies, and snaps, and worrits, and won't speak to her sometimes for a whole morning, the brute."

"But is he not fond of his children?"

"Fond? Yes, his way, and small thanks to him, the little angels! To play with 'em when they're good, and tell them cock-and-a-bull fairy-tales—wonder why he likes to put such stuff into their heads—and then send 'em out of the room if they make a noise, because it splits his poor head, and his nerves are so delicate. Wish he had hers, or mine either, Doctor Thurnall; then he'd know what nerves was, in a frail woman, which he uses us both as his negro slaves, or would if I didn't stand up to him pretty sharp now and then, and give him a piece of my mind, which I will do, like the faithful servant in the parable, if he kills me for it, Doctor Thurnall!"

"Does he drink?" asked Tom, bluntly.

"He!" she answered, in a tone which seemed to imply that even one masculine vice would have raised him in her eyes. "He's not man enough, I think; and lives on his slops, and his coffee, and his tapioca; and how's he ever to have any appetite, always a sitting about, heaped up together over his books, with

his ribs growing into his backbone?—If he'd only go and take his walk, or get a spade and dig in the garden, or anything but them everlasting papers, which I hates the sight of;" and so forth.

From all which Tom gathered a tolerably clear notion of the poor poet's state of body and mind; as a self-indulgent, unmethodical person, whose ill-temper was owing partly to perpetual brooding over his own thoughts, and partly to dyspepsia, brought on by his own effeminacy—in both cases, not a thing to be pitied or excused by the hearty and valiant Doctor. And Tom's original contempt for Vavasour took a darker form, perhaps one too dark to be altogether just.

"I'll tackle him, Miss Clara."

"I wish you would: I'm sure he wants some one to look after him just now. He's half wild about some review that somebody's been and done of him in The Times, and has been flinging the paper about the room, and calling all mankind vipers and adders, and hooting herds—it's as bad as swearing, I say—and running to my Mistress, to make her read it, and see how the whole world's against him, and then forbidding her to defile her eyes with a word of it; and so on, till she's been crying all the morning, poor dear!"

"Why not laughing at him?"

"Poor thing; that's where it all is: she's just as anxious about his poetry as he is, and would write it just as well as he, I'll warrant, if she hadn't better things to do; and all her fuss is, that people should 'appreciate' him. He's always talking about appreciating, till I hate the sound of the word. How any woman can go on so after a man that behaves as he does! but we're all soft fools, I'm afraid, Doctor Thurnall." And Clara began a languishing look or two across the counter, which made Tom answer to an imaginary Doctor Heale, whom he heard calling from within.

"Yes, Doctor! coming this moment, Doctor! Good-bye, Miss Clara. I must hear more next time; you may trust me, you know; secret as the grave, and always your friend, and your lady's too, if you will allow me to do myself such an honour. Coming, Doctor!"

And Tom bolted through the glass door, till Miss Clara was safe on her way up the street.

"Very well," said Tom to himself. "Knowledge is power: but how to use it? To get into Mrs. Vavasour's confidence, and show an inclination to take her part against her husband? If she be a true woman, she would order me out of the house on the spot, as surely as a fish-wife would fall tooth and nail on me as a base intruder, if I dared to interfere with her sacred right of

being beaten by her husband when she chooses. No; I must go straight to John Briggs himself, and bind him over to keep the peace; and I think I know the way to do it."

So Tom pondered over many plans in his head that day; and then went to Trebooze, and saw the sick child, and sat down to dinner, where his host talked loud about the Treboozes of Trebooze, who fought in the Spanish Armada—or against it; and showed an unbounded belief in the greatness and antiquity of his family, combined with a historic accuracy about equal to that of a good old dame of those parts, who used to say "her family comed over the water, that she knew; but whether it were with the Conqueror, or whether it were wi' Oliver, she couldn't exactly say!"

Then he became great on the subject of old county families in general, and poured out all the vials of his wrath on "that confounded upstart of a Newbroom, Lord Minchampstead," supplanting all the fine old blood in the country—"Why, Sir, that Pentremochyn, and Carcarrow moors too (——— good shooting there, there used to be), they ought to be mine, Sir, if every man had his rights!" And then followed a long story; and a confused one withal, for by this time Mr. Trebooze had drunk a great deal too much wine, and as he became aware of the fact, became proportionately anxious that Tom should drink too much also; out of which story Tom picked the plain facts, that Trebooze's father had mortgaged Pentremochyn estate for more than its value, and that Lord Minchampstead had foreclosed; while some equally respectable uncle, or cousin, just deceased, had sold the reversion of Carcarrow to the same mighty Cotton Lord twenty years before. "And this is the way, Sir, the land gets eaten up by a set of tinkers, and cobblers, and money-lending jobbers, who suck the blood of the aristocracy!" The oaths we omit, leaving the reader to pepper Mr. Trebooze's conversation therewith, up to any degree of heat which may suit his palate.

Tom sympathised with him deeply, of course; and did not tell him, as he might have done, that he thought the sooner such cumberers of the ground were cleared off, whether by an encumbered estates' act, such as we may see yet in England, or by their own suicidal folly, the better it would be for the universe in general, and perhaps for themselves in particular. But he only answered with pleasant effrontery—

"Ah, my dear Sir, I am sure there are hundreds of good sportsmen who can sympathise with you deeply. The wonder is, that you do not unite and defend yourselves. For not only in the west of England, but in Ireland, and in Wales, and in the north, too, if one is to believe those novels of Currer Bell's and her sister, there is a large and important class of landed pro-

prietors of the same stamp as yourself, and exposed to the very same dangers. I wonder at times that you do not all join, and use your combined influence on the Government."

"The Government? All a set of Whig traitors! Call themselves Conservative, or what they like. Traitors, Sir! from that fellow Peel upwards—all combined to crush the landed gentry—ruin the Church—betray the country party—D'Israeli—Derby—Free-trade—ruined, Sir!—Maynooth—Protection—treason—help yourself, and pass the—you know, old fellow—"

And Mr. Trebooze's voice died away, and he slumbered, but not softly.

The door opened, and in marched Mrs. Trebooze, tall, tawdry, and terrible.

"Mr. Trebooze! it's past eleven o'clock!"

"Hush, my dear Madam! He is sleeping so sweetly," said Tom, rising, and gulping down a glass, not of wine, but of strong ammonia and water. The rogue had put a phial thereof in his pocket that morning, expecting that, as Trebooze had said, he would be required to make a night of it.

She was silent; for to rouse her tyrant was more than she dare do. If awakened, he would crave for brandy and water; and if he got that sweet poison, he would probably become furious. She stood for half a minute; and Tom, who knew her story well, watched her curiously.

"She is a fine woman: and with a far finer heart in her than that brute. Her eyebrow and eye, now, have the true Siddons' stamp; the great white forehead, and sharp-cut little nostril, breathing scorn—and what a Siddons-like attitude!—I should like, madam, to see the child again before I go."

"If you are fit, Sir," answered she.

"Brave woman; comes to the point at once. I am a poor Doctor, Madam, and not a country gentleman; and have neither money nor health to spend in drinking too much wine."

"Then why do you encourage him in it, Sir? I had expected a very different sort of conduct from you, Sir."

Tom did not tell her what she would not (no woman will) understand; that it is morally and socially impossible to escape from the table of a fool, till either he or you are conquered; and she was too shrewd to be taken in by common-place excuses; so he looked her very full in the face, and replied a little haughtily, with a slow and delicate articulation, using his lips more than usual, and yet compressing them:—

I beg your pardon, madam, if I have unintentionally displeased you: but if you ever do me the honour of knowing more of me, you will be the first to confess that your words are unjust. Do you wish me to see your son, or do you not?"

Poor Mrs. Trebooze looked at him, with an eye which showed that she had been accustomed to study character keenly, perhaps in self-defence. She saw that Tom was sober; he had taken care to prove that, by the way in which he spoke; and she saw, too, that he was a better bred man than her husband, as well as a cleverer. She dropped her eye before his; heaved something very like a sigh; and then said, in her curt, fierce tone, which yet implied a sort of sullen resignation—

"Yes; come up-stairs."

Tom went up, and looked at the boy again, as he lay sleeping. A beautiful child of four years old, as large and fair a child as man need see; and yet there was on him the curse of his father's sins; and Tom knew it, and knew that his mother knew it also.

"What a noble boy!" said he, after looking, not without honest admiration, upon the sleeping child, who had kicked off his bedclothes, and lay in a wild graceful attitude, as children are wont to lie; just like an old Greek statue of Cupid. "It all depends upon you, Madam, now."

"On me?" she asked, in a startled, suspicious tone.

"Yes. He is a magnificent boy: but—I can only give palliatives. It depends upon your care now."

"He will have that, at least, I should hope," she said, nettled.

"And on your influence ten years hence," went on Tom.

"My influence?"

"Yes; only keep him steady, and he may grow up a magnificent man. If not—you will excuse me—but you must not let him live as freely as his father; the constitutions of the two are very different."

"Don't talk so, Sir. Steady? His father makes him drunk now, if he can; teaches him to swear, because it is manly—God help him and me!"

Tom's cunning and yet kind shaft had sped. He guessed that with a coarse woman like Mrs. Trebooze his best plan was to come as straight to the point as he could; and he was right. Ere half an hour was over, that woman had few secrets on earth which Tom did not know.

"Let me give you one hint before I go," said he, at last. "Persuade your husband to go into a militia regiment."

"Why? He would see so much company, and it would be so expensive."

"The expense would repay itself ten times over. The company which he would see would be sober company, in which he would be forced to keep in order. He would have something to do in the world; and he'd do it well. He is just cut out for a soldier, and might have made a gallant one by now, if he had had other men's chances. He will find he does his militia work well; and

it will be a new interest, and a new pride, and a new life to him. And meanwhile, Madam, what you have said to me is sacred. I do not pretend to advise or interfere. Only tell me if I can be of use—how, when, and where—and command me as your servant."

And Tom departed, having struck another root; and was up at four the next morning (he never worked at night; for, he said, he never could trust after-dinner brains), drawing out a detailed report of the Pentremochyn cottages, which he sent to Lord Minchampstead, with—

"And your Lordship will excuse my saying, that to put the cottages into the state in which your Lordship, with your known wish for progress of all kinds, would wish to see them, is a responsibility which I dare not take on myself, as it would involve a present outlay of not less than 450*l*. This sum would be certainly repaid to your Lordship and your tenants, in the course of the next three years, by the saving in poor-rates; an opinion for which I subjoin my grounds drawn from the books of the medical officer, Mr. Heale: but the responsibility and possible unpopularity, which employing so great a sum would involve, is more than I can, in the present dependent condition of poor-law medical officers, dare to undertake, in justice to Mr. Heale my employer, save at your special command. I am bound, however, to inform your Lordship, that this outlay would, I think, perfectly defend the hamlets, not only from that visit of the cholera which we have every reason to expect next summer, but also from those zymotic diseases which (as your Lordship will see by my returns) make up more than sixty-five per cent. of the aggregate sickness of the estate."

Which letter the old Cotton Lord put in his pocket, rode into Whitbury therewith, and showed it to Mark Armsworth.

"Well, Mr. Armsworth, what am I to do?

"Well, my Lord; I told you what sort of a man you'd have to do with; one that does his work thoroughly, and, I think, pays you a compliment, by thinking that you want it done thoroughly."

Lord Minchampstead was of the same opinion; but he did not say so. Few, indeed, have ever heard Lord Minchampstead give his opinion: though many a man has seen him act on it.

"I'll send down orders to my agent."

"Don't."

"Why, then, my good friend?"

"Agents are always in league with farmers, or guardians, or builders, or drain-tile makers, or attorneys, or bankers, or somebody; and either you'll be told that the work don't need doing; or have a job brewed out of it, to get off a lot of unsaleable drain-

tiles, or cracked soil-pans; or to get farm ditches dug, and perhaps the highway rates saved building culverts, and fifty dodges beside. I know their game; and you ought, too, by now, my Lord, begging your pardon."

"Perhaps I do, Mark," said his Lordship with a chuckle.

"So, I say, let the man that found the fox run the fox, and kill the fox, and take the brush home."

"And so it shall be," quoth my Lord Minchampstead.

CHAPTER IX.

"AM I NOT A WOMAN AND A SISTER?"

But what was the mysterious bond between La Cordifiamma and the American, which had prevented Scoutbush from following the example of his illustrious progenitor, and taking a viscountess from off the stage?

Certainly, anyone who had seen her with him on the morning after Scoutbush's visit to the Mellots, would have said that, if the cause was love, the love was all on one side.

She was standing by the fireplace in a splendid pose, her arm resting on the chimney-piece, the book from which she had been reciting in one hand, the other playing in her black curls, as her eyes glanced back ever and anon at her own profile in the mirror. Stangrave was half sitting in a low chair by her side, half kneeling on the footstool before her, looking up beseechingly, as she looked down tyrannically.

"Stupid, this reciting? Of course it is! I want realities, not shams; life, not the stage; nature, not art."

"Throw away the book, then, and words, and art, and live!"

She knew well what he meant; but she answered as if she had misunderstood him.

"Thanks, I live already, and in good company enough. My ghost-husbands are as noble as they are obedient; do all which I demand of them, and vanish on my errands when I tell them. Can you guess who my last is? Since I tired of Egmont, I have taken Sir Galahad, the spotless knight. Did you ever read the Mort d'Arthur?"

"A hundred times."

"Of course!" and she spoke in a tone of contempt so strong that it must have been affected. "What have you not read? And what have you copied? No wonder that these English have been what they have been for centuries, while their heroes have been the Galahads, and their Homer the Mort d'Arthur."

"Enjoy your Utopia!" said he bitterly. "Do you fancy they acted up to their ideals? They dreamed of the Quest of the Sangreal: but which of them ever went upon it?"

"And does it count for nothing that they felt it the finest thing in the world to have gone on it, had it been possible? Be sure if their ideal was so self-sacrificing, so lofty, their practice was ruled by something higher than the almighty dollar."

"And so are some other men's, Marie," answered he reproachfully.

"Yes, forsooth;—when the almighty dollar is there already, and a man has ten times as much to spend every day as he can possibly invest in French cookery, and wines, and fine clothes then he begins to lay out his surplus nobly on self-education, and the patronage of art, and the theatre—for merely æsthetic purposes, of course; and when the lust of the flesh has been satisfied. thinks himself an archangel, because he goes on to satisfy the lust of the eye and the pride of life. Christ was of old the model, and Sir Galahad was the hero. Now the one is exchanged for Goethe, and the other for Wilhelm Meister."

"Cruel! You know that my Goethe fever is long past. How would you have known of its existence if I had not confessed it to you as a sin of old years? Have I not said to you, again and again, show me the thing which you would have me do for your sake, and see if I will not do it!"

"For my sake? A noble reason! Show yourself the thing which you will do for its own sake; because it ought to be done. Show it yourself, I say; I cannot show you. If your own eyes cannot see the Sangreal, and the angels who are bearing it before you, it is because they are dull and gross; and am I Milton's archangel, to purge them with euphrasy and rue? If you have a noble heart, you will find for yourself the noblest Quest. If not, who can prove to you that it is noble?" And tapping impatiently with her foot, she went on to herself—

> "A gentle sound, an awful light!
> Three angels bear the holy Grail:
> With folded feet, in stoles of white,
> On sleeping wings they sail.
> Ah, blessed vision! blood of God!
> The spirit beats her mortal bars,
> As down dark tides the glory slides,
> And star-like mingles with the stars."

"Why, there was not a knight of the round table, was there, who did not give up all to go upon that Quest, though only one was found worthy to fulfil it? But now-a-days, the knights sit drinking hock and champagne, or drive sulky-wagons, and never fancy that there is a Quest at all."

"Why talk in these parables?"

"So the Jews asked of their prophets. They are no parables to my ghost-husband Sir Galahad. Now go, if you please; I must be busy, and write letters."

He rose with a look, half of disappointment, half amused, and yet his face bore a firmness which seemed to say, "You will be mine yet." As he rose, he cast his eye upon the writing-table, and upon a letter which lay there: and as he did so, his cheek grew pale, and his brows knitted.

The letter was addressed to "Thomas Thurnall, Esq., Aberalva."

"Is this, then, your Sir Galahad?" asked he, after a pause, during which he had choked down his rising jealousy, while she looked first at herself in the glass, and then at him, and then at herself again, with a determined and triumphant air.

"And what if it be?"

"So he, then, has achieved the Quest of the Sangreal?"

Stangrave spoke bitterly, and with an emphasis upon the "he;" and—

"What if he have? Do you know him?" answered she, while her face lighted up with eager interest, which she did not care to conceal, perhaps chose, in her woman's love of tormenting, to parade.

"I knew a man of that name once," he replied, in a carefully careless tone, which did not deceive her; "an adventurer—a doctor, if I recollect—who had been in Texas and Mexico, and I know not where besides. Agreeable enough he was; but as for your Quest of the Sangreal, whatever it may be, he seemed to have as little notion of anything beyond his own interest as any Greek I ever met."

"Unjust! Your words only show how little you can see! That man, of all men I ever met, saw the Quest at once, and followed it, at the risk of his own life, as far at least as he was concerned with it:—ay, even when he pretended to see nothing. Oh, there is more generosity in that man's affected selfishness, than in all the noisy good-nature which I have met with in the world. Thurnall! oh, you know his nobleness as little as he knows it himself."

"Then he, I am to suppose, is your phantom-husband, for as long, at least, as your present dream lasts?" asked he, with white, compressed lips.

"He might have been, I believe," she answered carelessly, "if he had even taken the trouble to ask me."

"Marie, this is too much! Do you not know to whom you speak? To one who deserves, if not common courtesy, at least common mercy."

"Because he adores me, and so forth? So has many a man done; or told me that he has done so. Do you know that I might be a viscountess to-morrow, so Sabina informs me, if I but chose?"

"A viscountess? Pray accept your effete English aristocrat, and, as far as I am concerned, accept my best wishes for your happiness."

"My effete English aristocrat, did I show him that pedigree of mine which I have ere now threatened to show you, would perhaps be less horrified at it than you are."

"Marie, I cannot bear this! Tell me only what you mean. What care I for pedigree? I want you—worship you—and that is enough, Marie!"

"You admire me because I am beautiful. What thanks do I owe you for finding out so patent a fact? What do you do more to me than I do to myself?" and she glanced back once more at the mirror.

"Marie, you know that your words are false; I do more—"

"You admire me," interrupted she, "because I am clever. What thanks to you for that, again? What do you do more to me than you do to yourself?"

"And this, after all—"

"After what? After you found me, or rather I found you—you the critic, the arbiter of the green-room, the highly-organized do-nothing—teaching others how to do nothing most gracefully; the would-be Goethe who must, for the sake of his own self-development, try experiments on every weak woman whom he met. And I, the new phenomenon, whom you must appreciate to show your own taste, patronise to show your own liberality, develop to show your own insight into character. You found yourself mistaken! You had attempted to play with the tigress—and behold she was talons; to angle for the silly fish—and behold the fish was the better angler, and caught you."

"Marie, have mercy! Is your heart iron?"

"No; but fire, as my name shows:" and she stood looking down on him with a glare of dreadful beauty.

"Fire, indeed!"

"Yes, fire, that I may scorch you, kindle you, madden you, to do my work, and wear the heart of fire which I wear day and night!"

Stangrave looked at her startled. Was she mad? Her face did not say so; her brow was white, her features calm, her eye fierce and contemptuous, but clear, steady, full of meaning.

"So you know Mr. Thurnall?" said she, after a while.

"Yes; why do you ask?"

"Because he is the only friend I have on earth."

"The only friend, Marie?"

"The only one," answered she calmly, "who, seeing the right, has gone and done it forthwith. When did you see him last?"

"I have not been acquainted with Mr. Thurnall for some years," said Stangrave, haughtily.

"In plain words, you have quarrelled with him?"

Stangrave bit his lip.

"He and I had a difference. He insulted my nation, and we parted."

She laughed a long, loud, bitter laugh, which rang through Stangrave's ears.

"Insulted your nation? And on what grounds, pray?"

"About that accursed slavery question!"

La Cordifiamma looked at him with firm-closed lips a while.

"So, then! I was not aware of this! Even so long ago you saw the Sangreal, and did not know it when you saw it. No wonder that since then you have been staring at it for months, in your very hands, played with it, admired it, made verses about it, to show off your own taste: and yet were blind to it the whole time! Farewell, then!"

"Marie, what do you mean?" and Stangrave caught both her hands.

"Hush, if you please. I know you are eloquent enough, when you choose, though you have been somewhat dumb and monosyllabic to-night in the presence of the actress whom you undertook to educate. But I know that you can be eloquent, so spare me any brilliant appeals, which can only go to prove that already settled fact. Between you and me lie two great gulfs. The one I have told you of; and from it I shrink. The other I have not told you of; from it you would shrink."

"The first is your Quest of the Sangreal."

She smiled assent, bitterly enough.

"And the second?"

She did not answer. She was looking at herself in the mirror; and Stangrave, in spite of his almost doting affection, flushed with anger, almost contempt, at her vanity.

And yet, was it vanity which was expressed in that face? No; but dread, horror, almost disgust, as she gazed with side-long, startled eyes, struggling, and yet struggling in vain, to turn her face from some horrible sight, as if her own image had been the Gorgon's head.

"What is it? Marie, speak!"

But she answered nothing. For that last question she had no heart to answer; no heart to tell him that in her veins were some drops, at least, of the blood of slaves. Instinctively she had looked round at the mirror—for might he not, if he had

eyes, discover that secret for himself? Were there not in her features traces of that taint? And as she looked,—was it the mere play of her excited fancy,—or did her eyelid slope more and more, her nostril shorten and curl, her lips enlarge, her mouth itself protrude?

It was more than the play of fancy; for Stangrave saw it as well as she. Her actress's imagination, fixed on the African type with an intensity proportioned to her dread of seeing it in herself, had moulded her features, for the moment, into the very shape which it dreaded. And Stangrave saw it, and shuddered as he saw.

Another half minute, and that face also had melted out of the mirror, at least for Marie's eyes; and in its place an ancient negress, white-haired, withered as the wrinkled ape, but with eyes closed—in death. Marie knew that face well; a face which haunted many a dream of hers; once seen, but never forgotten since; for to that old dame's coffin had her mother, the gay quadroon woman, flaunting in finery which was the price of shame, led Marie when she was but a three years' child; and Marie had seen her bend over the corpse, and call it her dear old granny, and weep bitter tears.

Suddenly she shook off the spell, and looked round and down, terrified, self-conscious. Her eye caught Stangrave's; she saw, or thought she saw, by the expression of his face, that he knew all, and burst away with a shriek.

He sprang up and caught her in his arms. "Marie! Beloved Marie!" She looked up at him struggling; the dark expression had vanished, and Stangrave's love-blinded eyes could see nothing in that face but the refined and yet rich beauty of the Italian.

"Marie, this is mere madness; you excite yourself till you know not what you say, or what you are—"

"I know what I am," murmured she: but he hurried on unheeding.

"You love me, you know you love me; and you madden yourself by refusing to confess it!" He felt her heart throb as he spoke, and knew that he spoke truth. "What gulfs are these you dream of? No; I will not ask. There is no gulf between me and one whom I adore, who has thrown a spell over me which I cannot resist, which I glory in not resisting; for you have been my guide, my morning star, which has awakened me to new life. If I have a noble purpose upon earth, if I have roused myself from that conceited dream of self-culture which now looks to me so cold, and barren, and tawdry, into the hope of becoming useful, beneficent—to whom do I owe it but to you, Marie? No; there is no gulf, Marie! You are my wife, and you alone!' And he held her so firmly, and gazed down upon

her with such strong manhood, that her woman's heart quailed, and he might, perhaps, have conquered then and there, had not Sabina, summoned by her shriek, entered hastily.

"Good heavens! what is the matter?"

"Wait but one minute, Mrs. Mellot," said he; "the next, I shall introduce you to my bride."

"Never! never! never!" cried she, and breaking from him, flew into Sabina's arms. "Leave me, leave me to bear my curse alone!"

And she broke out into such wild weeping, and refused so wildly to hear another word from Stangrave, that he went away in despair, the prize snatched from his grasp in the very moment of seeming victory.

He went in search of Claude, who had agreed to meet him at the Exhibition in Trafalgar Square. Thither Stangrave rolled away in his cab, his heart full of many thoughts. Marie's words about him, though harsh and exaggerated, were on the whole true. She had fascinated him utterly. To marry her was now the one object of his life: she had awakened in him, as he had confessed, noble desires to be useful: but the discovery that he was to be useful to the negro, that abolition was the Sangreal in the quest of which he was to go forth, was as disagreeable a discovery as he could well have made.

From public life in any shape, with all its vulgar noise, its petty chicanery, its pandering to the mob whom he despised, he had always shrunk, as so many Americans of his stamp have done. He had no wish to struggle, unrewarded and disappointed, in the ranks of the minority; while to gain place and power on the side of the majority was to lend himself to that fatal policy which, ever since the Missouri Compromise of 1820, has been gradually making the northern states more and more the tools of the southern ones. He had no wish to be threatened in Congress with having his Northerner's "ears nailed to the counter, like his own base coin," or to be informed that he, with the 17,000,000 of the north, were the "White Slaves" of a southern aristocracy of 350,000 slaveholders. He had enough compre hension of, enough admiration for the noble principles of the American Constitution to see that the democratic mobs of Irish and Germans, who were stupidly playing into the hands of the Southerners, were not exactly carrying them out; but he had no mind to face either Irish or Southerners. The former were too vulgar for his delicacy; the latter too aristocratic for his pride. Sprung, as he held (and rightly), from as fine old English blood as any Virginian (though it did happen to be Puritan, and not Cavalier), he had no lust to come into contact with men who considered him much further below them in rank than an English footman is below an English nobleman; who, indeed,

would some of them look down on the English nobleman himself as a mushroom of yesterday. So he compounded with his conscience by ignoring the whole matter, and by looking on the state of public affairs on his side of the Atlantic with a cynicism which very soon (as is usual with rich men) passed into Epicureanism. Poetry and music, pictures and statues, amusement and travel, became his idols, and cultivation his substitute for the plain duty of patriotism; and wandering luxuriously over the world, he learnt to sentimentalize over cathedrals and monasteries, pictures and statues, saints and kaisers, with a lazy regret that such "forms of beauty and nobleness" were no longer possible in a world of scrip and railroads: but without any notion that it was his duty to reproduce in his own life, or that of his country, as much as he could of the said beauty and nobleness. And now he was sorely tried. It was interesting enough to "develop" the peculiar turn of Marie's genius, by writing for her plays about liberty, just as he would have written plays about jealousy, or anything else for representing which she had "capabilities." But to be called on to act in that Slavery question, the one on which he knew (as all sensible Americans do) that the life and death of his country depended, and which for that very reason he had carefully ignored till a more convenient season, finding in its very difficulty and danger an excuse for leaving it to solve itself:—to have this thrust on him, and by her, as the price of the thing which he must have, or die! If she had asked for his right hand, he would have given it sooner; and he entered the Royal Academy that day in much the same humour as that of a fine lady who should find herself suddenly dragged from the ball-room into the dust-hole, in her tenderest array of gauze and jewels, and there peremptorily compelled to sift the cinders, under the superintendence of the sweep and the pot-boy.

Glad to escape from questions which he had rather not answer too soon, he went in search of Claude, and found him before one of those pre-Raphaelite pictures, which Claude does not appreciate as he ought.

"Desinit in Culicem mulier formosa supernè," said Stangrave, as he looked over Claude's shoulder; "but I suppose he followed nature, and copied his model."

"That he didn't," said Claude, "for I know who his model was: but if he did, he had no business to do so. I object on principle to these men's notion of what copying nature means. I don't deny him talent. I am ready to confess that there is more imagination and more honest work in that picture than in any one in the room. The hysterical, all but grinning joy upon the mother's face is a miracle of truth: I have seen the expres-

sion more than once; doctors see it often, in the sudden revulsion from terror and agony to certainty and peace; I only marvel where he ever met it: but the general effect is unpleasing, marred by patches of sheer ugliness, like that child's foot. There is the same mistake in all his pictures. Whatever they are, they are not beautiful; and no magnificence of surface-colouring will make up, in my eyes, for wilful ugliness of form. I say that nature is beautiful; and therefore nature cannot have been truly copied, or the general effect would have been beautiful also. I never found out the fallacy till the other day, when looking at a portrait by one of them. The woman for whom it was meant was standing by my side, young and lovely; the portrait hung there neither young nor lovely, but a wrinkled caricature twenty years older than the model."

"I surely know the portrait you mean;—Lady D——'s."

"Yes. He had simply, under pretence of following nature, caricatured her into a woman twenty years older than she is."

"But did you ever see a modern portrait which more perfectly expressed character; which more completely fulfilled the requirements which you laid down a few evenings since?"

"Never; and that makes me all the more cross with the wilful mistake of it. He had painted every wrinkle."

"Why not, if they were there?"

"Because he had painted a face not one-twentieth of the size of life. What right had he to cram into that small space all the marks which nature had spread over a far larger one?"

"Why not, again, if he diminished the marks in proportion?"

"Just what neither he nor any man could do, without making them so small as to be invisible, save under a microscope: and the result was, that he had caricatured every wrinkle, as his friend has in those horrible knuckles of Shem's wife. Besides, I deny utterly your assertion that one is bound to paint what is there. On that very fallacy are they all making shipwreck."

"Not paint what is there? And you are the man who talks of art being highest when it copies nature."

"Exactly. And therefore you must paint, not what is there, but what you see there. They forget that human beings are men with two eyes, and not daguerreotype lenses with one eye, and so are contriving and striving to introduce into their pictures the very defect of the daguerreotype which the stereoscope is required to correct."

"I comprehend. They forget that the double vision of our two eyes gives a softness, and indistinctness, and roundness, to every outline."

"Exactly so; and therefore, while for distant landscapes, motionless, and already softened by atmosphere, the daguerreo-

type is invaluable (I shall do nothing else this summer but work at it), yet for taking portraits, in any true sense, it will be always useless, not only for the reason I just gave, but for another one which the pre-Raphaelites have forgotten."

"Because all the features cannot be in focus at once?"

"Oh no, I am not speaking of that. Art, for aught I know, may overcome that; for it is a mere defect in the instrument. What I mean is this: it tries to represent as still what never yet was still for the thousandth part of a second: that is, the human face; and as seen by a spectator who is perfectly still, which no man ever yet was. My dear fellow, don't you see that what some painters call idealizing a portrait is, if it be wisely done, really painting for you the face which you see, and know, and love; her ever-shifting features, with expression varying more rapidly than the gleam of the diamond on her finger; features which you, in your turn, are looking at with ever-shifting eyes; while, perhaps, if it is a face which you love and have lingered over, a dozen other expressions equally belonging to it are hanging in your memory, and blending themselves with the actual picture on your retina:—till every little angle is somewhat rounded, every little wrinkle somewhat softened, every little shade somewhat blended with the surrounding light, so that the sum total of what you see, and are intended by Heaven to see, is something far softer, lovelier—younger, perhaps, thank Heaven—than it would look if your head was screwed down in a vice, to look with one eye at her head screwed down in a vice also:—though even that, thanks to the muscles of the eye, would not produce the required ugliness; and the only possible method of fulfilling the pre-Raphaelite ideal would be, to set a petrified Cyclops to paint his petrified brother."

"You are spiteful."

"Not at all. I am standing up for art, and for nature too. For instance: Sabina has wrinkles. She says, too, that she has grey hairs coming. The former I won't see, and therefore don't. The latter I can't see, because I am not looking for them."

"Nor I either," said Stangrave, smiling. "I assure you the announcement is new to me."

"Of course. Who can see wrinkles in the light of those eyes, that smile, that complexion?"

"Certainly," said Stangrave, "if I asked for her portrait, as I shall do some day, and the artist sat down and painted the said 'wastes of time,' on pretence of their being there, I should consider it an impertinence on his part. What business has he to spy out what nature is taking such charming trouble to conceal?"

"Again," said Claude, "such a face as Cordifiamma's. When

it is at rest, in deep thought, there are lines in it which utterly puzzle one—touches which are Eastern, Kabyle, almost Quadroon."

Stangrave started. Claude went on unconscious:—

"But who sees them in the light of that beauty? They are defects, no doubt, but defects which no one would observe without deep study of the face. They express her character no more than a scar would; and therefore when I paint her, as I must and will, I shall utterly ignore them. If, on the other hand, I met the same lines in a face which I knew to have Quadroon blood in it, I should religiously copy them; because then they would be integral elements of the face. You understand?"

"Understand?—yes," answered Stangrave, in a tone which made Claude look up.

That strange scene of half an hour before flashed across him. What if it were no fancy? What if Marie had African blood in her veins? And Stangrave shuddered, and felt for the moment that thousands of pounds would be a cheap price to pay for the discovery that his fancy was a false one.

"Yes—oh—I beg your pardon," said he, recovering himself. "I was thinking of something else. But, as you say, what if she had Quadroon blood?"

"I? I never said so, or dreamt of it."

"Oh! I mistook. Do you know, though, where she came from?"

"I? You forget, my dear fellow, that you yourself introduced her to us."

"Of course; but I thought Mrs. Mellot might—women always makes confidences."

"All we know is, what I suppose you knew long ago, that her most intimate friend, next to you, seems to be an old friend of ours, named Thurnall."

"An old friend of yours?"

"Oh yes; we have known him these fifteen years. Met him first at Paris; and after that went round the world with him, and saw infinite adventures. Sabina and I spent three months with him once, among the savages in a South-sea Island, and a very pretty romance our stay and our escape would make. We were all three, I believe, to have been cooked and eaten, if Tom had not got us off by that wonderful address which, if you know him, you must know well enough."

"Yes," answered Stangrave, coldly, as in a dream; "I have known Mr. Thurnall in past years; but not in connexion with La Signora Cordifiamma. I was not aware till this moment—this morning, I mean—that they knew each other."

"You astound me; why, she talks of him to us all day long,

as of one to whom she has the deepest obligations; she was ready to rush into our arms when she first found that we knew him. He is a greater hero in her eyes, I sometimes fancy, than even you are. She does nothing (or fancies that she does nothing, for you know her pretty wilfulness) without writing for his advice."

"I a hero in her eyes? I was really not aware of that fact," said Stangrave, more coldly than ever; for bitter jealousy had taken possession of his heart. "Do you know, then, what this same obligation may be?"

"I never asked. I hate gossiping, and I make a rule to inquire into no secrets but such as are voluntarily confided to me; and I know that she has never told Sabina."

"I suppose she is married to him. That is the simplest explanation of the mystery."

"Impossible! What can you mean? If she ever marries living man, she will marry you."

"Then she will never marry living man," said Stangrave to himself. "Good-bye, my dear fellow; I have an engagement at the Traveller's." And away went Stangrave, leaving Claude sorely puzzled, but little dreaming of the powder-magazine into which he had put a match.

But he was puzzled still more that night, when by the latest post a note came—

"From Stangrave!" said Claude. "Why, in the name of all wonders!"—and he read:—

"Good-bye. I am just starting for the Continent, on sudden and urgent business. What my destination is I hardly can tell you yet. You will hear from me in the course of the summer."

Claude's countenance fell, and the note fell likewise. Sabina snatched it up, read it, and gave La Cordifiamma a look which made her spring from the sofa, and snatch it in turn.

She read it through, with trembling hands, and blanching cheeks, and then dropped fainting upon the floor.

They laid her on the sofa, and while they were recovering her, Claude told Sabina the only clue which he had to the American's conduct, namely, that afternoon's conversation.

Sabina shook her head over it; for to her, also, the American's explanation had suggested itself. Was Marie Thurnall's wife? Or did she—it was possible, however painful—stand to him in some less honourable relation, which she would fain forget now, in a new passion for Stangrave? For that Marie loved Stangrave, Sabina knew well enough.

The doubt was so ugly that it must be solved; and when she had got the poor thing safe into her bed-room she alluded to it as gently as she could.

Marie sprang up in indignant innocence.

"He? Whatever he may be to others, I know not: but to me he has been purity and nobleness itself—a brother, a father! Yes; if I had no other reason for trusting him, I should love him for that alone; that however tempted he may have been, and Heaven knows he was tempted, he could respect the honour of his friend, though that friend lay sleeping in a soldier's grave ten thousand miles away."

And Marie threw herself upon Sabina's neck, and under the pressure of her misery sobbed out to her the story of her life. What it was need not be told. A little common sense, and a little knowledge of human nature, will enable the reader to fill up for himself the story of a beautiful slave.

Sabina soothed her, and cheered her; and soothed and cheered her most of all by telling her in return the story of her own life; not so dark a one, but almost as sad and strange. And poor Marie took heart, when she found in her great need a sister in the communion of sorrows.

"And you have been through all this, so beautiful and bright as you are! You whom I should have fancied always living the life of the humming-bird: and yet not a scar or a wrinkle has it left behind!"

"They were there once, Marie; but God and Claude smoothed them away."

"I have no Claude,—and no God, I think, at times."

"No God, Marie! Then how did you come hither?"

Marie was silent, reproved; and then passionately—

"Why does He not right my people?"

That question was one to which Sabina's little scheme of the universe had no answer; why should it, while many a scheme which pretends to be far vaster and more infallible has none as yet?

So she was silent, and sat with Marie's head upon her bosom, caressing the black curls, till she had soothed her into sobbing exhaustion.

"There; lie there and rest: you shall be my child, my poor Marie. I have a fresh child every week; but I shall find plenty of room in my heart for you, my poor hunted deer."

"You will keep my secret?"

"Why keep it? No one need be ashamed of it here in free England."

"But he—he—you do not know, Sabina! Those Northerners, with all their boasts of freedom, shrink from us just as much as our own masters."

"Oh, Marie, do not be so unjust to him! He is too noble, and you must know it yourself."

"Ay, if he stood alone; if he were even going to live in

England; if he would let himself be himself; but public opinion," sobbed the poor self-tormentor—"It has been his God, Sabina, to be a leader of taste and fashion—admired and complete—the Crichton of Newport and Brooklyn. And he could not bear scorn, the loss of society. Why should he bear it for me? If he had been one of the abolitionist party, it would have been different: but he has no sympathy with them, good, narrow, pious people, or they with him: he could not be satisfied in their society—or I either, for I crave after it all as much as he—wealth, luxury, art, brilliant company, admiration, —oh, inconsistent wretch that I am! And that makes me love him all the more, and yet makes me so harsh to him, wickedly cruel, as I was to-day; because when I am reproving his weakness, I am reproving my own, and because I am angry with myself, I grow angry with him too—envious of him, I do believe at moments, and all his success and luxury!"

And so poor Marie sobbed out her confused confession of that strange double nature which so many Quadroons seem to owe to their mixed blood; a strong side of deep feeling, ambition, energy, an intellect rather Greek in its rapidity than English in sturdiness; and withal a weak side, of instability, inconsistency, hasty passion, love of present enjoyment, sometimes, too, a tendency to untruth, which is the mark, not perhaps of the African specially, but of every enslaved race.

Consolation was all that Sabina could give. It was too late to act. Stangrave was gone, and week after week rolled by without a line from the wanderer.

CHAPTER X.

THE RECOGNITION.

Elsley Vavasour is sitting one morning in his study, every comfort of which is of Lucia's arrangement and invention, beating the home-preserve of his brains for pretty thoughts. On he struggles through that wild, and too luxuriant cover; now brought up by a "lawyer," now stumbling over a root, now bogged in a green spring, now flushing a stray covey of birds of Paradise, now a sphinx, chimæra, strix, lamia, fire-drake, flying-donkey, two-headed eagle (Austrian, as will appear shortly), or other portent only to be seen now-a-days in the recesses of that enchanted forest, the convolutions of a poet's brain. Up they whir and rattle, making, like most game, more noise than they are worth. Some get back, some dodge among the trees; the fair shots are few and far between: but Elsley

blazes away right and left with trusty quill; and, to do him justice, seldom misses his aim, for practice has made him a sure and quick marksman in his own line. Moreover, all is game which gets up to-day; for he is shooting for the kitchen, or rather for the London market, as many a noble sportsman does now a-days, and thinks no shame. His new volume of poems ("The Wreck" included) is in the press: but behold, it is not as long as the publisher thinks fit, and Messrs. Brown and Younger have written down to entreat in haste for some four hundred lines more, on any subject which Mr. Vavasour may choose. And therefore is Elsley beating his home covers, heavily shot over though they have been already this season, in hopes that a few head of his own game may still be left: or in default (for human nature is the same, in poets and in sportsmen), that a few head may have strayed in out of his neighbours' manors.

At last the sport slackens; for the sportsman is getting tired, and hungry also, to carry on the metaphor; for he has seen the postman come up the front walk a quarter of an hour since, and the letters have not been brought in yet.

At last there is a knock at the door, which he answers by a somewhat testy "come in." But he checks the coming grumble, when not the maid, but Lucia enters.

Why not grumble at Lucia? He has done so many a time.

Because she looks this morning so charming; really quite pretty again, so radiant is her face with smiles. And because, also, she holds triumphant above her head a newspaper.

She dances up to him—

"I have something for you."

"For me? Why, the post has been in this half-hour."

"Yes, for you, and that's just the reason why I kept it myself. D'ye understand my Irish reasoning?"

"No, you pretty creature," said Elsley, who saw that whatever the news was, it was good news.

"Pretty creature, am I? I was once, I know; but I thought you had forgotten all about that. But I was not going to let you have the paper till I had devoured every word of it myself first."

"Every word of what?"

"Of what you shan't have unless you promise to be good for a week. Such a Review; and from America! What a dear man he must be who wrote it! I really think I should kiss him if I met him."

"And I really think he would not say no. But as he's not here, I shall act as his proxy."

"Be quiet, and read that, if you can, for blushes;" and she

spread out the paper before him, and then covered his eyes with her hands. "No, you shan't see it; it will make you vain."

Elsley had looked eagerly at the honeyed columns; (as who would not have done?) but the last word smote him. What was he thinking of? his own praise, or his wife's love?

"Too true," he cried, looking up at her. "You dear creature! Vain I am, God forgive me: but before I look at a word of this I must have a talk with you."

"I can't stop; I must run back to the children. No; now don't look cross;" as his brow clouded, "I only said that to tease you. I'll stop with you ten whole minutes, if you won't look so very solemn and important. I hate tragedy faces. Now what is it?"

As all this was spoken while both her hands were clasped round Elsley's neck, and with looks and tones of the very sweetest as well as the very sauciest, no offence was given, and none taken: but Elsley's voice was sad as he asked,—

"So you really do care for my poems?"

"You great silly creature! Why else did I marry you at all? As if I cared for anything in the world but your poems; as if I did not love everybody who praises them; and if any stupid reviewer dares to say a word against them I could kill him on the spot. I care for nothing in the world but what people say of you. —And yet I don't care one pin; I know what your poems are, if nobody else does; and they belong to me, because you belong to me, and I must be the best judge, and care for nobody, no not I!"—And she began singing, and then hung over him, tormenting him lovingly while he read.

It was a true American review, utterly extravagant in its laudations, whether from over-kindness, or from a certain love of exaggeration and magniloquence, which makes one suspect that a large proportion of the Transatlantic gentlemen of the press must be natives of the sister isle: but it was all the more pleasant to the soul of Elsley.

"There," said Lucia, as she clung croodling to him; "there is a pretty character of you, Sir! Make the most of it, for it is all those Yankees will ever send you."

"Yes," said Elsley, "if they would send one a little money, instead of making endless dollars by printing one's books, and then a few more by praising one at a penny a line."

"That's talking like a man of business: if instead of the review, now, a cheque for fifty pounds had come, how I would have rushed out and paid the bills!"

"And liked it a great deal better than the review?"

"You jealous creature! No. If I could always have you

praised, I'd live in a cabin, and go about the world barefoot, like a wild Irish girl."

"You would make a very charming one."

"I used to, once, I can tell you. Valencia and I used to run about without shoes and stockings at Kilanbaggan, and you can't think how pretty and white this little foot used to look on a nice soft carpet of green moss."

"I shall write a sonnet to it."

"You may if you choose, provided you don't publish it."

"You may trust me for that. I am not one of those who anatomise their own married happiness for the edification of the whole public, and make fame, if not money, out of their own wives' hearts."

"How I should hate you, if you did! Not that I believe their fine stories about themselves. At least, I am certain it's only half the story. They have their quarrels, my dear, just as you and I have: but they take care not to put them into poetry."

"Well, but who could? Whether they have a right or not to publish the poetical side of their married life, it is too much to ask them to give you the unpoetical also."

"Then they are all humbugs; and I believe, if they really love their wives so very much, they would not be at all that pains to persuade the world of it."

"You are very satirical and spiteful, Ma'am."

"I always am when I am pleased. If I am particularly happy, I always long to pinch somebody. I suppose it's Irish—

'Comes out, meets a friend, and for love knocks him down.'"

"But you know, you rogue, that you care to read no poetry but love poetry."

"Of course not; every woman does; but let me find you publishing any such about me, and see what I will do to you! There, now I must go to my work, and you go and write something extra-superfinely grand, because I have been so good to you. No. Let me go; what a bother you are. Good-bye."

And away she tripped, and he returned to his work, happier than he had been for a week past.

His happiness, truly, was only on the surface. The old wound had been salved—as what wound cannot be?—by woman's love and woman's wit: but it was not healed. The cause of his wrong doing, the vain, self-indulgent spirit, was there still unchastened; and he was destined, that very day, to find that he had still to bear the punishment of it.

Now the reader must understand, that though one may laugh at Elsley Vavasour, because it is more pleasant than scolding at

him, yet have Philistia and Fogeydom neither right nor reason to consider him a despicable or merely ludicrous person, or to cry, "Ah, if he had been as we are!"

Had he been merely ludicrous, Lucia would never have married him; and he could only have been spoken of with indignation, or left utterly out of the story, as a simply unpleasant figure, beyond the purposes of a novel, though admissible now and then into tragedy. One cannot heartily laugh at a man if one has not a lurking love for him, as one really ought to have for Elsley. How much value is to be attached to his mere power of imagination and fancy, and so forth, is a question; but there was in him more than mere talent: there was, in thought at least, virtue and magnanimity.

True, the best part of him, perhaps almost all the good part of him, spent itself in words, and must be looked for, not in his life, but in his books. But in those books it can be found; and if you look through them, you will see that he has not touched upon a subject without taking, on the whole, the right, and pure, and lofty view of it. Howsoever extravagant he may be in his notions of poetic licence, that licence is never with him a synonyme for licentiousness. Whatever is tender and true, whatever is chivalrous and high-minded, he loves at first sight, and reproduces it lovingly. And it may be possible that his own estimate of his poems was not altogether wrong; that his words may have awakened here and there in others a love for that which is morally as well as physically beautiful, and may have kept alive in their hearts the recollection that, both for the bodies and the souls of men forms of life far nobler and fairer than those which we see now are possible; that they have appeared, in fragments at least, already on the earth; that they are destined, perhaps, to reappear and combine themselves in some ideal state, and in

> "One far-off divine event,
> Toward which the whole creation moves."

This is the special and proper function of the poet; that he may do this, does God touch his lips with that which, however it may be misused, is still fire from off the altar beneath which the spirits of his saints cry,—"Lord, how long?" If he "reproduce the beautiful" with this intent, however so little, then is he of the sacred guild. And because Vavasour had this gift, therefore he was a poet.

But in this he was weak: that he did not feel, or at least was forgetting fast, that this gift had been bestowed on him for any practical purpose. No one would demand that he should have gone forth with some grand social scheme, to reform a world which looked to him so mean and evil. He was not a man of

business, and was not meant to be one. But it was ill for him that in his fastidiousness and touchiness he had shut himself out from that world, till he had quite forgotten how much good there was in it as well as evil; how many people—commonplace and unpoetical it may be—but still heroical in God's sight, were working harder than he ever worked, at the divine drudgery of doing good, and that in dens of darkness and sloughs of filth from which he would have turned with disgust; so that the sympathy with the sinful and fallen which marks his earlier poems, and which perhaps verges on sentimentalism, gradually gives place to a Pharisaic and contemptuous tone; a tone more lofty and manful in seeming, but far less divine in fact. Perhaps comparative success had injured him. Whilst struggling himself against circumstances, poor, untaught, unhappy, he had more fellow-feeling with those whom circumstance oppressed. At least, the pity which he could once bestow upon the misery which he met in his daily walks, he now kept for the more picturesque woes of Italy and Greece.

In this, too, he was weak; that he had altogether forgotten that the fire from off the altar could only be kept alight by continual self-restraint and self-sacrifice, by continual gentleness and humility, shown in the petty matters of every-day home-life and that he who cannot rule his own household can never rule the Church of God. And so it befell, that amid the little cross-blasts of home squabbles the sacred spark was fast going out. The poems written after he settled at Penalva are marked by a less definite purpose, by a lower tone of feeling: not, perhaps, by a lower moral tone; but simply by less of any moral tone at all. They are more and more full of merely sensuous beauty, mere word-painting, mere word-hunting. The desire of finding something worth saying gives place more and more to that of saying something in a new fashion. As the originality of thought (which accompanies only vigorous moral purpose) decreases, the attempt at originality of language increases. Manner, in short, has taken the place of matter. The art, it may be, of his latest poems is greatest: but it has been expended on the most unworthy themes. The later are mannered caricatures of the earlier, without their soul; and the same change seems to have passed over him which (with Mr. Ruskin's pardon) transformed the Turner of 1820 into the Turner of 1850.

Thus had Elsley transferred what sympathy he had left from needle-women and ragged schools, dwellers in Jacob's Island and sleepers in the dry arches of Waterloo Bridge, to sufferers of a more poetic class. Whether his sympathies showed thereby that he had risen or fallen, let my readers decide each for himself. It is a credit to any man to feel for any human being; and Italy,

as she is at this moment, is certainly one of the most tragic spectacles which the world has ever seen. Elsley need not be blamed for pitying her; only for holding, with most of our poets, a vague notion that her woes were to be cured by a hair of the dog who bit her; viz. by homœopathic doses of that same "art" which has been all along her morbid and self-deceiving substitute for virtue and industry. So, as she had sung herself down to the nether pit, Elsley would help to sing her up again; and had already been throwing off, ever since 1848, a series of sonnets which he entitled Eurydice, intimating, of course, that he acted as the Orpheus. Whether he had hopes of drawing iron tears down Pluto Radetzky's cheek, does not appear; but certainly the longer poem which had sprung from his fancy, at the urgent call of Messrs. Brown and Younger, would have been likely to draw nothing but iron balls from Radetzky's cannon; or failing so vast an effect, an immediate external application to the poet himself of that famous herb Pantagruelion, cure for all public ills and private woes, which men call hemp. Nevertheless, it was a noble subject; one which ought surely to have been taken up by some of our poets, for if they do not make a noble poem of it, it will be their own fault. I mean that sad and fantastic tragedy of Fra Dolcino and Margaret, which Signor Mariotti has lately given to the English public, in a book which, both for its matter and its manner, should be better known than it is. Elsley's soul had been filled (it would have been a dull one else) with the conception of the handsome and gifted patriot-monk, his soul delirious with the dream of realizing a perfect Church on earth; battling with tongue and pen, and at last with sword, against the villanies of pope and kaiser, and all the old devourers of the earth, cheered only by the wild love of her who had given up wealth, fame, friends, all which render life worth having, to die with him a death too horrible for words. And he had conceived (and not altogether ill) a vision, in which, wandering along some bright Italian bay, he met Dolcino sitting, a spirit at rest but not yet glorified, waiting for the revival of that dead land for which he had died; and Margaret by him, dipping her scorched feet for ever in the cooling wave, and looking up to the hero for whom she had given up all, with eyes of everlasting love. There they were to prophesy to him such things as seemed fit to him, of the future of Italy and of Europe, of the doom of priests and tyrants, of the sorrows and rewards of genius unappreciated and before its age; for Elsley's secret vanity could see in himself a far greater likeness to Dolcino, than Dolcino—the preacher, confessor, bender of all hearts, man of the world and man of action, at last crafty and all but unconquerable guerilla warrior—would ever have acknowledged in the self-indulgent

dreamer. However, it was a fair conception enough; though perhaps it never would have entered Elsley's head, had Shelley never written the opening canto of the Revolt of Islam.

So Elsley, on a burning July forenoon, strolled up the lane and over the down to King Arthur's Nose, that he might find materials for his sea-shore scene. For he was not one of those men who live in such quiet, every-day communication with nature, that they drink in her various aspects as unconsciously as the air they breathe; and so can reproduce them, out of an inexhaustible stock of details, simply and accurately, and yet freshly too, tinged by the peculiar hue of the mind in which they have been long sleeping. He walked the world, either blind to the beauty round him, and trying to compose instead some little scrap of beauty in his own self-imprisoned thoughts; or else he was looking out consciously and spasmodically for views, effects, emotions, images; something striking and uncommon which would suggest a poetic figure, or help out a description, or in some way re-furnish his mind with thought. From which method it befell, that his lamp of truth was too often burnt out just when it was needed; and that, like the foolish virgins, he had to go and buy oil when it was too late; or failing that, to supply its place with some baser artificial material.

That day, however, he was fortunate enough; for wandering and scrambling among the rocks, at a dead low spring tide, he came upon a spot which would have made a poem of itself better than all Elsley ever wrote, had he, forgetting all about Fra Dolcino, Italy, priests, and tyrants, set down in black and white just what he saw; provided, of course, that he had patience first to see the same.

It was none other than that ghastly chasm across which Thurnall had been so miraculously swept, on the night of his shipwreck. The same ghastly chasm: but ghastly now no longer; and as Elsley looked down, the beauty below invited him, and the coolness also; for the sun beat on the flat rock above till it scorched the feet, and dazzled the eye, and crisped up the blackening sea-weeds; while every sea-snail crept to hide itself under the bladder-tangle, and nothing dared to peep or stir save certain grains of gunpowder, which seemed to have gone mad, so merrily did they hop about upon the surface of the fast evaporating salt-pools. That wonder, indeed, Elsley stooped to examine, and drew back his hands with an "ugh!" and a gesture of disgust, when he found that they were "nasty little insects." For Elsley held fully the poet's right to believe that all things are not very good; none, indeed, save such as suited his eclectic and fastidious taste; and to hold (on high æsthetic grounds, of course) toads and spiders in as much abhorrence as

does any boarding-school girl. However, finding some rock ledges which formed a natural ladder, down he scrambled, gingerly enough, for he was neither an active nor a courageous man. But, once down, I will do him the justice to say, that for five whole minutes he forgot all about Fra Dolcino, and, what was better, about himself also.

The chasm may have been fifteen feet deep, and above, about half that breadth; but below, the waves had hollowed it into dark overhanging caverns. Just in front of him a huge boulder spanned the crack; and formed a natural doorway, through which he saw, like a picture set in a frame, the far-off blue sea softening into the blue sky among brown Eastern haze. Amid the haze a single ship hung motionless, like a white cloud. Nearer, a black cormorant floated sleepily along, and dived, and rose again. Nearer again, long lines of flat tide-rock, glittering and quivering in the heat, sloped gradually under the waves, till they ended in half-sunken beds of olive oar-weed, which bent their tangled stems into a hundred graceful curves, and swayed to and fro slowly and sleepily. The low swell slid whispering among their floating palms, and slipped on toward the cavern's mouth, as if asking wistfully (so Elsley fancied) when it would be time for it to return to that cool shade, and hide from all the blinding blaze outside. But when his eye was enough accustomed to the shade within, it withdrew gladly from the glaring sea and glaring tide-rocks to the walls of the chasm itself; to curved and polished sheets of stone, rich brown, with snow-white veins, on which danced for ever a dappled network of pale yellow light; to crusted beds of pink coralline; to caverns, in the dark crannies of which hung branching sponges and tufts of purple sea-moss; to strips of clear white sand, bestrewn with shells; to pools, each a gay flower-garden of all hues, where branching sea-weeds reflected blue light from every point, like a thousand damasked sword-blades; while among them, dahlias and chrysanthemums, and many another mimic of our earth-born flowers, spread blooms of crimson, and purple, and lilac, and creamy grey, half-buried among feathered weeds as brightly coloured as they; and strange and gaudy fishes shot across from side to side, and chased each other in and out of hidden cells.

Within and without all was at rest; the silence was broken only by the timid whisper of the swell, and by the chime of dropping water within some unseen cave: but what a different rest! Without, all lying breathless, stupified, sun-stricken, in blinding glare; within, all coolness and refreshing sleep. Without, all simple, broad, and vast; within, all various, with infinite richness of form and colour.—An Hairoun Alraschid's bower looking out upon the—

Bother the fellow! Why will he go on analysing and figuring in this way? Why not let the blessed place tell him what it means, instead of telling it what he thinks? And—why, he is actually writing verses, though not about Fra Dolcino!

> "How rests yon rock, whose half-day's bath is done,
> With broad bright side, beneath the broad bright sun,
> Like sea-nymph tired, on cushioned mosses sleeping.
> Yet, nearer drawn, beneath her purple tresses,
> From down-bent brows we find her slowly weeping
> So many a heart for cruel man's caresses
> Must only pine and pine, and yet must bear
> A gallant front beneath life's gaudy glare."

Silly fellow! Do you think that Nature had time to think of such a far-fetched conceit as that while it was making that rock and peopling it with a million tiny living things, of which not one falleth to the ground without your Father's knowledge, and each more beautiful than any sea-nymph whom you ever fancied? For, after all, you cannot fancy a whole sea-nymph (perhaps in that case you could make one), but only a very little scrap of her outside. Or if, as you boast, you are inspired by the Creative Spirit, tell us what the Creative Spirit says about that rock, and not such verse as that, the lesson of which you don't yourself really feel. Pretty enough it is, perhaps: but in your haste to say a pretty thing, just because it was pretty, you have not cared to condemn yourself out of your own mouth. Why were you sulky, Sir, with Mrs. Vavasour this very morning, after all that passed, because she would look over the washing-books, while you wanted her to hear about Fra Dolcino? And why, though she was up to her knees among your dirty shirts when you went out, did you not give her one parting kiss, which would have transfigured her virtuous drudgery for her into a sacred pleasure? One is heartily glad to see you disturbed, cross though you may look at it, by that sturdy step and jolly whistle which burst in on you from the other end of the chasm, as Tom Thurnall, with an old smock frock over his coat and a large basket on his arm, comes stumbling and hopping towards you, dropping every now and then on hands and knees, and turning over on his back, to squeeze his head into some muddy crack, and then withdraw it with the salt water dripping down his nose.

Elsley closed his eyes, and rested his head on his hand in a somewhat studied "pose." But as he wished not to be interrupted, it may not have been altogether unpardonable to pretend sleep. However, the sleeping posture had exactly the opposite effect to that which he designed.

"Ah, Mr. Vavasour!"

"Humph!" quoth he slowly, if not sulkily.

"I admire your taste, Sir; a charming summer-house old Triton has vacated for your use; but let me advise you not to go to sleep in it."

"Why then, Sir?"

"Because—It's no business of mine, of course: but the tide has turned already; and if a breeze springs up old Triton will be back again in a hurry, and in a rage also; and—I may possibly lose a good patient."

Elsley, who knew nothing about the tides, save that "the moon wooed the ocean," or some such important fact, thanked him coolly enough, and returned to a meditative attitude. Tom saw that he was in the seventh heaven, and went on: but he had not gone three steps before he pulled up short, slapping his hands together once, as a man does who has found what he wants; and then plunged up to his knees in a rock pool, and then began working very gently at something under water.

Elsley watched him for full five minutes with so much curiosity, that, despite of himself, he asked him what he was doing.

Tom had his whole face under water, and did not hear, till Elsley had repeated the question.

"Only a rare zoophyte," said he at last, lifting his dripping visage, and gasping for breath; and then he dived again.

"Inexplicable pedantry of science!" thought Elsley to himself, while Tom worked on steadfastly, and at last rose, and, taking out a phial from his basket, was about to deposit in it something invisible.

"Stay a moment; you really have roused my curiosity by your earnestness. May I see what it is for which you have taken so much trouble?"

Tom held out on his finger a piece of slimy crust the size of a halfpenny. Elsley could only shrug his shoulders.

"Nothing to you, Sir, I doubt not; but worth a guinea to me, even if it be only to mount bits of it as microscopic objects."

"So you mingle business with science?" said Elsley, rather in a contemptuous tone.

"Why not? I must live, and my father too; and it is as honest a way of making money as any other: I poach in no man's manor for my game."

"But what is your game? What possible attraction in that bit of dirt can make men spend their money on it?"

"You shall see," said Tom, dropping it into the phial of salt water, and offering it to Elsley, with his pocket magnifier.

"Judge for yourself."

Elsley did so, and beheld a new wonder—a living plant of crystal, studded with crystal bells, from each of which waved a crown of delicate arms. It was the first time that Elsley had

ever seen one of those exquisite zoophytes which stud every rock and every tuft of weed.

"This is most beautiful," said he at length.

"Humph! why should not Mr. Vavasour write a poem about it?"

"Why not, indeed?" thought Elsley.

"It's no business of mine, no man's less: but I often wonder why you poets don't take to the microscope, and tell us a little more about the wonderful things which are here already, and not about those which are not, and which, perhaps, never will be."

"Well," said Elsley, after another look: "but, after all, these things have no human interest in them."

"I don't know that; they have to me, for instance. These are the things which I would write about if I had any turn for verse, not about human nature, of which I know, I'm afraid, a little too much already. I always like to read old 'Darwin's Loves of the Plants;' bosh as it is in a scientific point of view, it amuses one's fancy without making one lose one's temper, as one must when one begins to analyse the microscopic ape called self and friends."

"You would like, then, the old Cosmogonies, the Eddas and the Vedas," said Elsley, getting interested, as most people did after five minutes' talk with the cynical doctor. "I suppose you would not say much for their science; but, as poetry, they are just what you ask for—the expression of thoughtful spirits, who looked round upon nature with awe-struck, child-like eyes, and asked of all heaven and earth the question, 'What are you? How came you to be?' Yet—it may be my fault—while I admire them, I cannot sympathise with them. To me, this zoophyte is as a being of another sphere; and till I can create some link in my own mind between it and humanity it is as nothing in my eyes."

"There is link enough, Sir, don't doubt, and chains of iron and brass too."

"You believe then, in the development theory of the 'Vestiges'?"

"Doctors who have their bread to earn never commit themselves to theories. No; all I meant was, that this little zoophyte lives by the same laws as you and I; and that he, and the seaweeds, and so forth, teach us doctors certain little rules concerning life and death, which you will have a chance soon of seeing at work on the most grand and poetical, and indeed altogether tragic scale."

"What do you mean?"

"When the cholera comes here as it will, at its present pace.

before the end of the summer, then I shall have the zoophytes rising up in judgment against me, if I have not profited by a leaf out of their book."

"The cholera?" said Elsley in a startled voice, forgetting Tom's parables in the new thought. For Elsley had a dread more nervous than really coward of infectious diseases; and he had also (and prided himself, too, on having) all Goethe's dislike of anything terrible or horrible, of sickness, disease, wounds, death, anything which jarred with that "beautiful" which was his idol.

"The cholera?" repeated he. "I hope not; I wish you had not mentioned it, Mr. Thurnall."

"I am very sorry that I did so, if it offends you. I had thought that forewarned was forearmed. After all, it is no business of mine; if I have extra labour, as I shall have, I shall have extra experience; and that will be a fair set-off, even if the board of guardians don't vote me an extra remuneration, as they ought to do."

Elsley was struck dumb; first by the certainty which Tom's words expressed, and next by the coolness of their temper. At last he stammered out, "Good heavens, Mr. Thurnall! you do not talk of that frightful scourge—so disgusting, too, in its character—as a matter of profit and loss? It is sordid, cold-hearted!"

"My dear Sir, if I let myself think, much more talk, about the matter in any other tone, I should face the thing poorly enough when it came. I shall have work enough to keep my head about the end of August or beginning of September, and I must not lose it beforehand, by indulging in any horror, disgust, or other emotion perfectly justifiable in a layman."

"But are not doctors men?"

"That depends very much on what 'a man' means."

"Men with human sympathy and compassion."

"Oh, I mean by a man, a man with human strength. My dear Sir, one may be too busy, and at doing good too (though that is not my line, save professionally, because it is my only way of earning money); but one may be too busy at doing good to have time for compassion. If while I was cutting a man's leg off I thought of the pain which he was suffering—"

"Thank Heaven!" said Elsley, "that it was not my lot to become a medical man."

Tom looked at him with the quaintest smile: a flush of mingled anger and contempt had been rising in him as he heard the ex-bottle boy talking sentiment: but he only went on quietly,

"No, Sir; with your more delicate sensibilities, you may thank Heaven that you did not become a medical man; your life would have been one of torture, disgust, and agonizing sense of respon-

sibility. But do you not see that you must thank Heaven for the sufferer's sake also? I will not shock you again by talking of amputation; but even in the smallest matter—even if you were merely sending medicine to an old maid—suppose that your imagination were preoccupied by the thought of her old age, her sufferings, her disappointed hopes, her regretful dream of bygone youth, and beauty, and love, and all the tender fancies which might well spring out of such a mournful spectacle, would you not be but too likely (pardon the bathos) to end by sending her an elderly gentleman's medicine after all, and so either frightfully increasing her sufferings, or ending them once for all?"

Tom said this in the most quiet and natural tone, without even a twinkle of his wicked eye: but Elsley heard him begin with reddening face; and as he went on, the red had turned to purple, and then to deadly yellow; till making a half-step forward he cried fiercely:—

"Sir!" and then stopped suddenly; for his feet slipped upon the polished stone, and on his face he fell into the pool at Thurnall's feet.

"Well for both of us geese!" said Tom inwardly, as he went to pick him up. "I verily believe he was going to strike me, and that would have done for neither of us. I was a fool to say it; but the temptation was so exquisite; and it must have come some day."

But Vavasour staggered up of his own accord, and dashing away Tom's proffered hand, was rushing off without a word.

"Not so, Mr. John Briggs!" said Tom, making up his mind in a moment that he must have it out now, or never; and that he might have everything to fear from Vavasour if he let him go home furious. "We do not part thus, Sir!"

"We will meet again, if you will," foamed Vavasour, "but it shall end in the death of one of us!"

"By each other's potions? I can doctor myself, Sir, thank you. Listen to me, John Briggs! You shall listen!" and Tom sprang past him, and planted himself at the foot of the rock steps, to prevent his escaping upward.

"What, do you wish to quarrel with me, Sir? It is I who ought to quarrel with you. I am the aggrieved party, and not you, Sir! I have not seen the son of the man who, when I was an apothecary's boy, petted me, lent me books, introduced me as a genius, turned my head for me—which was just what I was vain enough to enjoy—I have not seen that man's son cast ashore penniless and friendless, and yet never held out to him a helping hand, but tried to conceal my identity from him, from a dirty shame of my honest father's honest name."

Vavasour dropped his eyes, for was it not true? but he raised them again more fiercely than ever.

"Curse you! I owe you nothing. It was you who made me ashamed of it. You rhymed on it, and laughed about poetry coming out of such a name."

"And what if I did? Are poets to be made of nothing but tinder and gall? Why could you not take an honest joke as it was meant and go your way like other people, till you had shown yourself worth something, and won honour even, for the name of Briggs?"

"And I have! I have my own station now, my own fame, Sir, and it is nothing to you what I choose to call myself. I have won my place, I say, and your mean envy cannot rob me of it."

"You have your station. Very good," said Tom, not caring to notice the imputation; "you owe the greater part of it to your having made a most fortunate marriage, for which I respect you, as a practical man. Let your poetry be what it may (and people tell me that it is really very beautiful), your match shows me that you are a clever, and therefore a successful person."

"Do you take me for a sordid schemer, like yourself? I loved what was worthy of me, and won it because I deserved it."

"Then, having won it, treat it as it deserves," said Tom, with a cool, searching look, before which Vavasour's eyes fell again. "Understand me, Mr. John Briggs; it is of no consequence to me what you call yourself: but it is of consequence to me that I should not have a patient in my parish whom I cannot cure; for I cannot cure broken hearts, though they will be simple enough to come to me for medicine."

"You shall have no chance! You shall never enter my house! You shall not ruin me, Sir, by your bills!"

Tom made no answer to this fresh insult. He had another game to play.

"Take care what you say, Briggs; remember that, after all, you are in my power, and I had better remind you plainly of the fact."

"And you mean to make me your tool? I will die first!"

"I believe that," said Tom, who was very near adding, "that he should be sorry to work with such tools."

"My tools are my lancet and my drugs," said he, quietly, "and all I have to say refers to them. It suits my purpose to become the principal medical man in this neighbourhood—"

"And I am to tout for introductions for you?"

"You are to be so very kind as to allow me to finish my sentence, just as you would allow any other gentleman; and

because I wish for practice, and patients, and power, you will be so kind as to treat me henceforth as one high-minded man would treat another, to whom he is obliged. For you know, John Briggs, as well as I," said Tom, drawing himself up to his full height, "look me in the face, if you can, ere you deny it, that I was, while you knew me, as honourable a man and as kind-hearted a man, as you ever were; and that now—considering the circumstances under which we meet,—you have more reason to trust me, than I have, primâ facie, to trust you."

Vavasour answered not a word.

"Good-bye, then," said Tom, drawing aside from the step; "Mrs. Vavasour will be anxious about you. And mind! With regard to her first of all, Sir, and then with regard to other matters—as long, and only as long, as you remember that you are John Briggs of Whitbury, I shall be the first to forget it. There is my hand, for old acquaintance' sake."

Vavasour took the proffered hand coldly, paused a moment, and then wrung it in silence, and hurried away home.

"Have I played my ace ill after all?" said Tom, sitting down to consider. "As for whether I should have played it all, that's no business of mine now. Madam Might-have-been may see to that. But did I play ill? for if I did, I may try a new lead yet. Ought I to have twitted him about his wife? If he's venomous, it may only make matters worse; and still worse if he be suspicious. I don't think he was either in old times; but vanity will make a man so, and it may have made him. Well, I must only ingratiate myself all the more with her; and find out, too, whether she has his secret as well as I. What I am most afraid of is my having told him plainly that he was in my power; it's apt to make sprats of his size flounce desperately, in the mere hope of proving themselves whales after all, if it's only to their miserable selves. Never mind; he can't break my tackle; and besides, that gripe of the hand seemed to indicate that the poor wretch was beat, and thought himself let off easily—as indeed he is. We'll hope so. Now, zoophytes, for another turn with you!"

To tell the truth, however, Tom is looking for more than zoophytes, and has been doing so at every dead low tide since he was wrecked. He has heard nothing yet of his belt. The notes have not been presented at the London bank; nobody in the village has been spending more money than usual; for cunning Tom has contrived already to know how many pints of ale every man of whom he has the least doubt has drunk. Perhaps, after all, the belt may have been torn off in the life struggle; it may have been for a moment in Grace's hands and then have been swept back into the sea. What more

likely? And what more likely, in that case, that, sinking by its weight, it is wedged away in some cranny of the rocks? So spring-tide after spring-tide Tom searches, and all the more carefully because others are searching too, for waifs and strays from the wreck. Sad relics of mortality he finds at times, as others do: once, even, a dressing-case, full of rings and pins and chains, which belonged, he fancied, to a gay young bride with whom he had waltzed many a time on deck, as they slipped along before the soft trade-wind: but no belt. He sent the dressing-case to the Lloyd's underwriters, and searched on: but in vain. Neither could he find that any one else had forestalled him; and that very afternoon, sulky and disheartened, he determined to waste no more time about the matter, and strode home, vowing signal vengeance against the thief, if he caught him.

"And I will catch him! These west-country yokels, to fancy that they can do Tom Thurnall! It's adding insult to injury, as Sam Weller's parrot has it."

Now his shortest way home lay across the shore, and then along the beach, and up the steps by the little waterfall, past Mrs. Harvey's door; and at that door sat Grace, sewing in the sun. She looked up and bowed as he passed, smiling modestly, and little dreaming of what was passing in his mind; and when a very lovely girl smiled and bowed to Tom, he must needs do the same to her: whereon she added,—

"I beg your pardon, Sir: have you heard anything of the money you lost? I—we—have been so ashamed to think of such a thing happening here."

Tom's evil spirit was roused.

"Have *you* heard anything of it, Miss Harvey? For you seem to me the only person in the place who knows anything about the matter."

"I, Sir?" cried Grace, fixing her great startled eyes full on him.

"Why, Ma'am," said Tom, with a courtly smile, "you may possibly recollect, if you will so far tax your memory, that you had it in your hands at least a moment, when you did me the kindness to save my life; and as you were kind enough to inform me that I should recover it when I was worthy of it, I suppose I have not yet risen in your eyes to the required state of conversion and regeneration." And swinging impatiently away, he walked on, really afraid lest he should say something rude.

Grace half called after him, and then suddenly checking herself, rushed in to her mother with a wild and pale face.

"What is this Mr. Thurnall has been saying to me about his belt and money which he lost?"

"About what? Has he been rude to you, the bad man?" cried Mrs. Harvey, dropping the pie-dish in some confusion, and taking a long while to pick up the pieces.

"About the belt—the money which he lost! Why don't you speak, mother?"

"Belt—money? Ah, I recollect now. He has lost some money, he says."

"Of course he has."

"How should you know anything? I recollect there was some talk of it, though. But what matter what he says? He was quite passed away, I'll swear, when they carried him up."

"But, mother! mother! he says that I know about it; that I had it in my hands!"

"You? Oh the wicked wretch, the false, ungrateful, slanderous child of wrath, with adder's poison under his lips! No, my child! Though we're poor, we're honest! Let him slander us, rob us, of our good name, send us to prison, if he will—he cannot rob us of our souls. We'll be silent; we'll turn the other cheek, and commit our cause to One above who pleads for the orphan and the widow. We will not strive nor cry, my child. Oh, no!" And Mrs. Harvey began fussing over the smashed pie-dish.

"I shall not strive nor cry, mother," said Grace, who had recovered her usual calm: "but he must have some cause for these strange words. Do you recollect seeing me with the belt?"

"Belt, what's a belt? I know nothing about belts. I tell you he's a villain, and a slanderer. Oh, that it should have come to this, to have my child's fair fame blasted by a wretch that comes nobody knows where from, and has been doing nobody knows what, for aught I know!"

"Mother, mother! we know no harm of him. If he is mistaken, God forgive him!"

"If he is mistaken?" went on Mrs. Harvey, still over the pie-dish: but Grace gave her no answer. She was deep in thought. She recollected now, that as she had gone up the path from the cove on that eventful morning, she had seen Willis and Thurnall whispering earnestly together; and she recollected now, for the first time, that there had been a certain sadness and perplexity, almost reserve, about Willis ever since. Good heavens! could he suspect her too? She would find out that at least; and no sooner had her mother fussed away, talking angrily to herself, into the back kitchen, than Grace put on her bonnet and shawl, and went forth to find the Captain.

In an hour she returned. Her lips were firm set, her cheeks pale, her eyes red with weeping. She said nothing to her mother, who for her part did not seem inclined to allude again to the matter.

"Where have you been, child? You look quite poorly, and your eyes red."

"The wind is very cold, mother," said she, and went into her room. Her mother looked sharply after her, and muttered to herself.

Grace went in, and sat down on the bed.

"What a coldness this is at my heart!" she said aloud to herself, trying to smile; but she could not: and she sat on the bedside, without taking off her bonnet and shawl, her hands hanging listlessly by her side, her head drooping on her bosom, till her mother called her to tea: then she was forced to rouse herself, and went out, composed, but utterly wretched.

Tom walked up homeward, very ill at ease. He had played, to use his nomenclature, two trump cards running, and was by no means satisfied that he had played them well. He had no right, certainly, to be satisfied with either move; for both had been made in a somewhat evil spirit, and certainly for no very disinterested end.

That was a view of the matter, however, which never entered his mind; there was only that general dissatisfaction with himself which is, though men try hard to deny the fact, none other than the supernatural sting of conscience. He tried "to lay to his soul the flattering unction" that he might, after all, be of use to Mrs. Vavasour, by using his power over her husband: but he knew in his secret heart that any move of his in that direction was likely only to make matters worse; that to-day's explosion might only have sent home the hapless Vavasour in a more irritable temper than ever. And thinking over many things, backward and forward, he saw his own way so little, that he actually condescended to go and "pump" Frank Headley. So he termed it: but, after all, it was only like asking advice of a good man, because he did not feel himself quite good enough to advise himself.

The Curate was preparing to sally forth, after his frugal dinner. The morning he spent at the schools, or in parish secularities; the afternoon, till dusk, was devoted to visiting the poor; the night, not to sleep, but to reading and sermon writing. Thus, by sitting up till two in the morning, and rising again at six for his private devotions, before walking a mile and a half up to church for the morning service, Frank Headley burnt the candle of life at both ends very effectually, and showed that he did so by his pale cheeks and red eyes.

"Ah!" said Tom, as he entered. "As usual: poor Nature is being robbed and murdered by rich Grace."

"What do you mean now?" asked Frank, smiling, for he had become accustomed enough to Tom's quaint parables, though he had to scold him often enough for their irreverence.

"Nature says, 'after dinner sit awhile;' and even the dumb animals hear her voice, and lie by for a siesta when their stomachs are full. Grace says, 'Jump up and rush out the moment you have swallowed your food; and if you get an indigestion, abuse poor Nature for it; and lay the blame on Adam's fall.'"

"You are irreverent, my good Sir, as usual; but you are unjust also this time."

"How then?"

"Unjust to Grace, as you phrase it," answered Frank, with a quaint sad smile. "I assure you on my honour, that Grace has nothing whatsoever to do with my 'rushing out' just now, but simply the desire to do my good works that they may be seen of men. I hate going out. I should like to sit and read the whole afternoon: but I am afraid lest the dissenters should say, 'He has not been to see so-and-so for the last three days;' so off I go, and no credit to me."

Why had Frank dared, upon a month's acquaintance, to lay bare his own heart thus to a man of no creed at all? Because, I suppose, amid all differences, he had found one point of likeness between himself and Thurnall; he had found that Tom at heart was a truly genuine man, sincere and faithful to his own scheme of the universe.

How that man, through all his eventful life, had been enabled to

> "Bate not a jot of heart or hope,
> But steer right onward,"

was a problem which Frank longed curiously, and yet fearfully withal, to solve. There were many qualities in him which Frank could not but admire, and long to imitate; and, "Whence had they come?" was another problem at which he looked, trembling as many a new thought crossed him. He longed, too, to learn from Tom somewhat at least of that savoir faire, that power of "becoming all things to all men," which St. Paul had; and for want of which Frank had failed. He saw, too, with surprise, that Tom had gained in one month more real insight into the characters of his parishioners than he had done in twelve; and besides all, there was the craving of the lonely heart for human confidence and friendship. So it befell that Frank spoke out his inmost thought that day, and thought no shame; and it befell also, that Thurnall, when he heard it, said in his heart—

"What a noble, honest fellow you are, when you—"

But he answered enigmatically.

"Oh, I quite agree with you that Grace has nothing to do with it. I only referred it to that source because I thought you would do so."

"You ought to be ashamed of your dishonesty, then."

"I know it; but my view of the case is, that you rush out after dinner for the very same reason that the Yankee store-keeper does—from—You'll forgive me if I say it?"

"Of course. You cannot speak too plainly to me."

"Conceit; the Yankee fancies himself such an important person, that the commercial world will stand still unless he flies back to its help after ten minutes' gobbling, with his mouth full of pork and pickled peaches. And you fancy yourself so important in your line, that the spiritual world will stand still unless you bolt back to help it in like wise. Substitute a half-cooked mutton chop for the pork, and the cases are exact parallels."

"Your parallel does not hold good, Doctor. The Yankee goes back to his store to earn money for himself, and not to keep commerce alive."

"While you go for utterly disinterested motives.—I see."

"Do you?" said Frank. "If you think that I fancy myself a better man than the Yankee, you mistake me: but at least you will confess that I am not working for money."

"No; you have your notions of reward, and he has his. He wants to be paid by material dollars, payable next month; you by spiritual dollars, payable when you die. I don't see the great difference."

"Only the slight difference between what is material and what is spiritual."

"They seem to me, from all I can hear in pulpits, to be only two different sorts of pleasant things, and to be sought after, both alike, simply because they are pleasant. Self-interest, if you will forgive me, seems to me the spring of both: only, to do you justice, you are a farther-sighted and more prudent man than the Yankee store-keeper; and having more exquisitely developed notions of what your true self-interest is, are content to wait a little longer than he."

"You stab with a jest, Thurnall. You little know how your words hit home."

"Well, then, to turn from a matter of which I know nothing —I must keep you in, and give you parish business to do at home. I am come to consult you as my spiritual pastor and master."

Frank looked a little astonished.

"Don't be alarmed. I am not going to confess my own sins—only other people's."

"Pray don't, then. I know far more of them already than I can cure. I am worn out with the daily discovery of fresh evil wherever I go."

"Then why not comfort yourself by trying to find a little fresh good wherever you go?"

Frank sighed.

"Perhaps, though, you don't care for any sort of good except your own sort of good. You are fastidious. Well, you have your excuses. But you can understand a poor fellow like me, who has been dragged through the slums and sewers of this wicked world for fifteen years and more, being very well content with any sort of good which I can light on, and not particular as to either quantity or quality."

"Perhaps yours is the healthier state of mind; if you can only find the said good. The vulturine nose, which smells nothing but corruption, is no credit to its possessor. And it would be pleasant, at least, to find good in every man."

"One can't do that in one's study. Mixing with them is the only plan. No doubt they're inconsistent enough. The more you see of them, the less you trust them; and yet the more you see of them, the more you like them. Can you solve that paradox from your books?"

"I will try," said Frank. "I generally have more than one to think over when you go. But, surely, there are men so fallen that they are utterly insensible to good."

"Very likely. There's no saying in this world what may not be. Only I never saw one. I'll tell you a story; you may apply it as you like. When I was on the Texan expedition, and raw to soldiering and camping, we had to sleep in low ground, and suffered terribly from a miasma. Deadly cold it was, when it came; and the man who once got chilled through with it, just died. I was lying on the bare ground one night, and chilly enough I was—for I was short of clothes, and had lost my buffalo robe—but fell asleep: and on waking the next morning, I found myself covered up in my comrade's blankets, even to his coat, while he was sitting shivering in his shirt sleeves. The cold fog had come down in the night, and the man had stripped himself, and sat all night with death staring him in the face, to save my life. And all the reason he gave was, that if one of us must die, it was better the older should go first, and not a youngster like me. And," said Tom, lowering his voice, "that man was a murderer!"

"A murderer!"

"Yes; a drunken, gambling, cut-throat rowdy as ever grew ripe for the gallows. Now, will you tell me that there was nothing in that man but what the devil put there?"

Frank sat meditating awhile on this strange story, which is moreover a true one; and then looked up with something like tears in his eyes.

"And he did not die?"

"Not he! I saw him die afterwards—shot through the heart, without time even to cry out. But I have not forgotten what he did for me that night; and I'll tell you what, Sir! I do not believe that God has forgotten it either."

Frank was silent for a few moments, and then Tom changed the subject.

"I want to know what you can tell me about this Mr. Vavasour."

"Hardly anything, I am sorry to say. I was at his house at tea, two or three times, when I first came; and I had very agreeable evenings, and talks on art and poetry: but I believe I offended him by hinting that he ought to come to church, which he never does, and since then our acquaintance has all but ceased. I suppose you will say, as usual, that I played my cards badly there also."

"Not at all!" said Tom, who was disposed to take any one's part against Elsley. "If a clergyman has not a right to tell a man that, I don't see what right he has of any kind. Only," added he, with one of his quaint smiles, "the clergyman, if he compels a man to deal at his store, is bound to furnish him with the articles which he wants."

"Which he needs, or which he likes? For 'wanting' has both those meanings."

"With something that he finds by experience does him good; and so learns to like it, because he knows that he needs it, as my patients do my physic."

"I wish my patients would do so by mine: but, unfortunately, half of them seem to me not to know what their disease is, and the other half do not think they are diseased at all."

"Well," said Tom drily, "perhaps some of them are more right than you fancy. Every man knows his own business best."

"If it were so, they would go about it somewhat differently from what most of the poor creatures do."

"Do you think so? I fancy myself that not one of them does a wrong thing, but what he knows it to be wrong just as well as you do, and is much more ashamed and frightened about it already, than you can ever make him by preaching at him."

"Do you?"

"I do. I judge of others by myself."

"Then would you have a clergyman never warn his people of their sins?"

"If I were he, I'd much sooner take the sins for granted, and say to them, 'Now, my friends, I know you are all, ninety-nine

out of the hundred of you, not such bad fellows at bottom, and would all like to be good, if you only knew how ; so I'll tell you as far as I know, though I don't know much about the matter. For the truth is, you must have a hundred troubles every day which I never felt in my life ; and it must be a very hard thing to keep body and soul together, and to get a little pleasure on this side the grave without making blackguards of yourselves. Therefore I don't pretend to set myself up as a better or a wiser man than you at all: but I do know a thing or two which I fancy may be useful to you. You can but try it. So come up, if you like, any of you, and talk matters over with me as between gentleman and gentleman. I shall keep your secret, of course ; and if you find I can't cure your complaint, why, you can but go away and try elsewhere.' "

" And so the doctor's model sermon ends in proposing private confession !"

" Of course. The thing itself which will do them good, without the red rag of an official name, which sends them cackling off like frightened turkeys.—Such private confession as is going on between you and me now. Here am I confessing to you all my unorthodoxy."

" And I my ignorance," said Frank ; " for I really believe you know more about the matter than I do."

" Not at all. I may be all wrong. But the fault of your cloth seems to me to be that they apply their medicines without deigning, most of them, to take the least diagnosis of the case. How could I cure a man without first examining what was the matter with him ?"

" So say the old casuists, of whom I have read enough—some would say too much ; but they do not satisfy me. They deal with actions, and motives, and so forth ; but they do not go down to the one root of wrong which is the same in every man."

" You are getting beyond me: but why do you not apply a little of the worldly wisdom which these same casuists taught you ?"

" To tell you the truth, I have tried in past years, and found that the medicine would not act."

" Humph ! Well, that would depend, again, on the previous diagnosis of human nature being correct ; and those old monks, I should say, would know about as much of human nature as so many daws in a steeple. Still, you wouldn't say that what was the matter with old Heale was the matter also with Vavasour ?"

" I believe from my heart that it is."

" Humph ! Then you know the symptoms of his complaint ?"

" I know that he never comes to church."

" Nothing more ? I am really speaking in confidence. You

surely have heard of disagreements between him and Mrs. Vavasour?"

"Never, I assure you; you shock me."

"I am exceedingly sorry, then, that I said a word about it: but the whole parish talks of it," answered Tom, who was surprised at this fresh proof of the little confidence which Aberalva put in their parson.

"Ah!" said Frank sadly, "I am the last person in the parish to hear any news: but this is very distressing."

"Very, to me. My honour, to tell you the truth, as a medical man, is concerned in the matter; for she is growing quite ill from unhappiness, and I cannot cure her; so I come to you, as soul-doctor, to do what I, the body-doctor, cannot."

Frank sat pondering for a minute, and then—

"You set me on a task for which I am as little fit as any man, by your own showing. What do I know of disagreements between man and wife? And one has a delicacy about offering her comfort. She must bestow her confidence on me before I can use it: while he—"

"While he, as the cause of the disease, is what you ought to treat; and not her unhappiness, which is only a symptom of it."

"Spoken like a wise doctor: but to tell you the truth, Thurnall, I have no influence over Mr. Vavasour, and see no means of getting any. If he recognised my authority, as his parish priest, then I should see my way. Let him be as bad as he might, I should have a fixed point from which to work; but with his free-thinking notions, I know well—one can judge it too easily from his poems—he would look on me as a pedant assuming a spiritual tyranny to which I have no claim."

Tom sat awhile nursing his knee, and then—

"If you saw a man fallen into the water, what do you think would be the shortest way to prove to him that you had authority from heaven to pull him out? Do you give it up? Pulling him out, would it not be, without more ado?"

"I should be happy enough to pull poor Vavasour out, if he would let me. But till he believes that I can do it, how can I even begin?"

"How can you expect him to believe, if he has no proof?"

"There are proofs enough in the Bible and elsewhere, if he will but accept them. If he refuses to examine into the credentials, the fault is his, not mine. I really do not wish to be hard: but would not you do the same, if any one refused to employ you, because he chose to deny that you were a legally qualified practitioner?"

"Not so badly put; but what should I do in that case? Go on quietly curing his neighbours, till he began to alter his mind

as to my qualifications, and came in to be cured himself. But here's this difference between you and me. I am not bound to attend to any one who don't send for me; while you think that you are, and carry the notion a little too far, for I expect you to kill yourself by it some day."

"Well?" said Frank, with something of that lazy Oxford tone, which is intended to save the speaker the trouble of giving his arguments, when he has already made up his mind, or thinks that he has so done.

"Well, if I thought myself bound to doctor the man, willy-nilly, as you do, I would certainly go to him, and show him, at least, that I understood his complaint. That would be the first step towards his letting me cure him. How else on earth do you fancy that Paul cured those Corinthians about whom I have been reading lately?"

"Are you, too, going to quote Scripture against me? I am glad to find that your studies extend to St. Paul."

"To tell you the truth, your sermon last Sunday puzzled me. I could not comprehend (on your showing) how Paul got that wonderful influence over those pagans which he evidently had; and as how to get influence is a very favourite study of mine, I borrowed the book when I went home, and read for myself; and the matter at last seemed clear enough, on Paul's own showing."

"I don't doubt that: but I suspect your interpretation of the fact and mine would not agree."

"Mine is simple enough. He says that what proved him to be an apostle was his power. He is continually appealing to his power; and what can he mean by that, but that he could do, and had done, what he professed to do? He promised to make those poor heathen rascals of Greeks better, and wiser, and happier men; and, I suppose, he made them so; and then there was no doubt of his commission, or his authority, or anything else. He says himself he did not require any credentials, for they were his credentials, read and known of every one; he had made good men of them out of bad ones, and that was proof enough whose apostle he was."

"Well," said Frank half sadly, "I might say a great deal, of course, on the other side of the question, but I prefer hearing what you laymen think about it all."

"Will you be angry if I tell you honestly?"

"Did you ever find me angry at anything you said?"

"No. I will do you the justice to say that. Well, what we laymen say is this. If the parsons have the authority of which they boast, why don't they use it? If they have commission to make bad people good, they must have power too; for He whose

commission they claim, is not likely, I should suppose, to set a man to do what he cannot do."

"And we can do it, if people would but submit to us. It all comes round again to the same point."

"So it does. How to get them to listen. I tried to find out how Paul achieved that first step; and when I looked he told me plainly enough. By becoming all things to all men; by showing these people that he understood them, and knew what was the matter with them. Now do you go and do likewise by Vavasour, and then exercise your authority like a practical man. If you have power to bind and loose, as you told us last Sunday, bind that fellow's ungovernable temper, and loose him from the real slavery which he is in to his miserable conceit and self-indulgence! and then if he does not believe in your 'sacerdotal power,' he is even a greater fool than I take him for."

"Honestly, I will try: God help me!" added Frank in a lower voice; "but as for quarrels between man and wife, as I told you, no one understands them less than I."

"Then marry a wife yourself and quarrel a little with her for experiment, and then you'll know all about it."

Frank laughed in spite of himself.

"Thank you. No man is less likely to try that experiment than I."

"Hum!"

"I have quite enough as a bachelor to distract me from my work, without adding to them those of a wife and family, and those little home lessons in the frailty of human nature, in which you advise me to copy Mr. Vavasour."

"And so," said Tom, "having to doctor human beings, nineteen-twentieths of whom are married; and being aware that three parts of the miseries of human life come either from wanting to be married, or from married cares and troubles—you think that you will improve your chance of doctoring your flock rightly by avoiding carefully the least practical acquaintance with the chief cause of their disease. Philosophical and logical, truly!"

"You seem to have acquired a little knowledge of men and women, my good friend, without encumbering yourself with a wife and children."

"Would you like to go to the same school to which I went?" asked Thurnall, with a look of such grave meaning that Frank's pure spirit shuddered within him. "And I'll tell you this; whenever I see a woman nursing her baby, or a father with his child upon his knees, I say to myself—they know more, at this minute, of human nature, as of the great law of 'C'est l'amour,

l'amour, l'amour, which makes the world go round,' than I am likely to do for many a day. I'll tell you what, Sir! These simple natural ties, which are common to us and the dumb animals,—as I live, Sir, they are the divinest things I see in the world! I have but one, and that is love to my poor old father; that's all the religion I have as yet: but I tell you, it alone has kept me from being a ruffian and a blackguard. And I'll tell you more," said Tom, warming, "of all diabolical dodges for preventing the parsons from seeing who they are, or what human beings are, or what their work in the world is, or anything else, the neatest is that celibacy of the clergy. I should like to have you with me in Spanish America, or in France either, and see what you thought of it then. How it ever came into mortal brains is to me the puzzle. I've often fancied, when I've watched those priests—and very good fellows, too, some of them are—that there must be a devil after all abroad in the world, as you say; for no human insanity could ever have hit upon so complete and 'cute a device for making parsons do the more harm, the more good they try to do. There, I've preached you a sermon, and made you angry."

"Not in the least: but I must go now and see some sick."

"Well, go, and prosper; only recollect that the said sick are men and women."

And away Tom went, thinking to himself: "Well, that is a noble, straightforward, honest fellow, and will do yet, if he'll only get a wife. He's not one of those asses who have made up their minds by book that the world is square, and won't believe it to be round for any ocular demonstration. He'll find out what shape the world is before long, and behave as such, and act accordingly."

Little did Tom think, as he went home that day in full-blown satisfaction with his sermon to Frank, of the misery he had caused, and was going to cause for many a day, to poor Grace Harvey. It was a rude shock to her to find herself thus suspected; though perhaps it was one which she needed. She had never, since one first trouble ten years ago, known any real grief; and had therefore had all the more time to make a luxury of unreal ones. She was treated by the simple folk around her as all but inspired; and being possessed of real powers as miraculous in her own eyes as those which were imputed to her were in theirs, (for what are real spiritual experiences but daily miracles?) she was just in that temper of mind in which she required, as ballast, all her real goodness, lest the moral balance should topple headlong after the intellectual, and the downward course of vanity, excitement, deception, blasphemous assumptions be entered on. Happy for her that she was in Protestant and

common-sense England, and in a country parish, where mesmerism and spirit-rapping were unknown. Had she been an American, she might have become one of the most lucrative "mediums;" had she been born in a Romish country, she would have probably become an even more famous personage. There is no reason why she should not have equalled, or surpassed, the ecstasies of St. Theresa, or of St. Hildegardis, or any other sweet dreamer of sweet dreams; have founded a new order of charity, have enriched the clergy of a whole province, and have died in seven years, maddened by alternate paroxysms of self-conceit and revulsions of self-abasement. Her own preachers and class-leaders, indeed (so do extremes meet), would not have been sorry to make use of her in somewhat the same manner, however feebly and coarsely: but her innate self-respect and modesty had preserved her from the snares of such clumsy poachers; and more than one good-looking young preacher had fled desperately from a station where, instead of making a tool of Grace Harvey, he could only madden his own foolish heart with love for her.

So Grace had reigned upon her pretty little throne of not unbearable sorrows, till a real and bitter woe came; one which could not be hugged and cherished, like the rest; one which she tried to fling from her, angrily, scornfully, and found to her horror, that, instead of her possessing it, it possessed her, and coiled itself round her heart, and would not be flung away. She—she, of all beings, to be suspected as a thief, and by the very man whose life she had saved! She was willing enough to confess herself—and confessed herself night and morning—a miserable sinner, and her heart a cage of unclean birds, deceitful, and desperately wicked—except in that. The conscious innocence flashed up in pride and scorn, in thoughts, even when she was alone, in words, of which she would not have believed herself capable. With hot brow and dry eyes she paced her little chamber, sat down on the bed, staring into vacancy, sprang up and paced again: but she went into no trance—she dare not. The grief was too great; she felt that, if she once gave way enough to lose her self-possession, she should go mad. And the first, and perhaps not the least good effect of that fiery trial was, that it compelled her to a stern self-restraint, to which her will, weakened by mental luxuriousness, had been long a stranger.

But a fiery trial it was. That first wild (and yet not unnatural) fancy, that heaven had given Thurnall to her, had deepened day by day, by the mere indulgence of it. But she never dreamt of him as her husband: only as a friendless stranger to be helped and comforted. And that he was worthy of help; that some great future was in store for him; that he was a chosen vessel

marked out for glory, she had persuaded herself utterly; and the persuasion grew in her day by day, as she heard more and more of his cleverness, honesty, and kindliness, mysterious and, to her, miraculous learning. Therefore she did not make haste; she did not even try to see him, or to speak to him; a civil bow in passing was all that she took or gave; and she was content with that, and waited till the time came, when she was destined to do for him—what she knew not; but it would be done, if she were strong enough. So she set herself to learn, and read, and trained her mind and temper more earnestly than ever, and waited in patience for God's good time. And now, behold, a black, unfathomable gulf of doubt and shame had opened between them, perhaps for ever. And a tumult arose in her soul, which cannot be, perhaps ought not to be, analysed in words; but which made her know too well, by her own crimson cheeks, that it was none other than human love strong as death, and jealousy cruel as the grave.

At last long and agonizing prayer brought gentler thoughts, and mere physical exhaustion a calmer mood. How wicked she had been; how rebellious! Why not forgive him, as One greater than she had forgiven? It was ungrateful of him: but was he not human? Why should she expect his heart to be better than hers? Besides, he might have excuses for his suspicion. He might be the best judge, being a man, and such a clever one too. Yes; it was God's cross, and she would bear it; she would try and forget him. No; that was impossible; she must hear of him, if not see him, day by day: besides, was not her fate linked up with his? And yet shut out from him by that dark wall of suspicion! It was very bitter. But she could pray for him; she would pray for him now. Yes; it was God's cross, and she would bear it. He would right her if He thought fit; and if not, what matter? Was she not born to sorrow? Should she complain if another drop, and that the bitterest of all, was added to the cup?

And bear her cross she did, about with her, coming in, and going out, for many a weary day. There was no change in her habits or demeanour; she was never listless for a moment in her school; she was more gay and amusing than ever, when she gathered her little ones around her for a story: but still there was the unseen burden, grinding her heart slowly, till she felt as if every footstep was stained with a drop of her heart's blood. . . . Why not? It would be the sooner over.

Then, at times came that strange woman's pleasure in martyrdom, the secret pride of suffering unjustly: but even that, after a while, she cast away from her, as a snare, and tried to believe that she deserved all her sorrow—deserved it, that is, in the real

honest sense of the word; that she had worked it out, and earned it, and brought it on herself—how, she knew not, but longed and strove to know. No; it was no martyrdom. She would not allow herself so silly a cloak of pride; and she went daily to her favourite "Book of Martyrs," to contemplate there the stories of those who, really innocent, really suffered for well-doing. And out of that book she began to draw a new and a strange enjoyment, for she soon found that her intense imagination enabled her to re-enact those sad and glorious stories in her own person; to tremble, agonize, and conquer with those heroines who had been for years her highest ideals—and what higher ones could she have? And many a night, after extinguishing the light, and closing her eyes, she would lie motionless for hours on her little bed, not to sleep, but to feel with Perpetua the wild bull's horns, to hang with St. Maura on the cross, or lie with Julitta on the rack, or see with triumphant smile, by Anne Askew's side, the fire flare up around her at the Smithfield stake, or to promise, with dying Dorothea, celestial roses to the mocking youth, whose face too often took the form of Thurnall's; till every nerve quivered responsive to her fancy in agonies of actual pain, which died away at last into heavy slumber, as body and mind alike gave way before the strain. Sweet fool! she knew not—how could she know?—that she might be rearing in herself the seeds of idiotcy and death: but who that applauds a Rachel or a Ristori, for being able to make awhile their souls and their countenances the homes of the darkest passions, can blame her for enacting in herself, and for herself alone, incidents in which the highest and holiest virtue takes shape in perfect tragedy?

But soon another, and a yet darker cause of sorrow arose in her. It was clear, from what Willis had told her, that she had held the lost belt in her hand. The question was, how had she lost it?

Did her mother know anything about it? That question could not but arise in her mind, though for very reverence she dared not put it to her mother; and with it arose the recollection of her mother's strange silence about the matter. Why had she put away the subject, carelessly, and yet peevishly, whenever it was mentioned? Yes. Why? Did her mother know anything? Was she—? Grace dared not pronounce the adjective, even in thought; dashed it away as a temptation of the devil; dashed away, too, the thought which had forced itself on her too often already, that her mother was not altogether one who possessed the single eye; that in spite of her deep religious feeling, her assurance of salvation, her fits of bitter self-humiliation and despondency, there was an inclination to scheming and intrigue,

ambition, covetousness; that the secrets which she gained as class-leader too, were too often (Grace could but fear) used to her own advantage; that in her dealings her morality was not above the average of little country shop-keepers; that she was apt to have two prices; to keep her books with unnecessary carelessness when the person against whom the account stood was no scholar. Grace had more than once remonstrated in her gentle way; and had been silenced, rather than satisfied, by her mother's common-places as to the right of "making those who could pay, pay for those who could not;" that "it was very hard to get a living, and the Lord knew her temptations," and "that God saw no sin in His elect," and "Christ's merits were infinite," and "Christians always had been a backsliding generation;" and all the other common-places by which such people drug their consciences to a degree which is utterly incredible, except to those who have seen it with their own eyes, and heard it with their own ears, from childhood.

Once, too, in those very days, some little meanness on her mother's part brought the tears into Grace's eyes, and a gentle rebuke to her lips: but her mother bore the interference less patiently than usual; and answered, not by cant, but by counter-reproach. "Was she the person to accuse a poor widowed mother, struggling to leave her child something to keep her out of the workhouse? A mother that lived for her, would die for her, sell her soul for her, perhaps—"

And there Mrs. Harvey stopped short, turned pale, and burst into such an agony of tears, that Grace, terrified, threw her arms round her neck, and entreated forgiveness, all the more intensely on account of those thoughts within which she dared not reveal. So the storm passed over. But not Grace's sadness. For she could not but see, with her clear pure spiritual eye, that her mother was just in that state in which some fearful and shameful fall is possible, perhaps wholesome. "She would sell her soul for me? What if she have sold it, and stopped short just now, because she had not the heart to tell me that love for me had been the cause? Oh! if she have sinned for my sake! Wretch that I am! Miserable myself, and bringing misery with me! Why was I ever born? Why cannot I die—and the world be rid of me?"

No, she would not believe it. It was a wicked, horrible, temptation of the devil. She would rather believe that she herself had been the thief, tempted during her unconsciousness; that she had hidden it somewhere; that she should recollect, confess, restore all some day. She would carry it to him herself, grovel at his feet, and entreat forgiveness. "He will surely forgive, when he finds that I was not myself when—that it was

not altogether my fault—not as if I had been waking—yes, he will forgive!" And then on that thought followed a dream of what might follow, so wild that a moment after she had hid her blushes in her hands, and fled to books to escape from thoughts.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRST INSTALMENT OF AN OLD DEBT.

We must now return to Elsley, who had walked home in a state of mind truly pitiable. He had been flattering his soul with the hope that Thurnall did not know him; that his beard, and the change which years had made, formed a sufficient disguise: but he could not conceal from himself that the very same alterations had not prevented his recognising Thurnall; and he had been living for two months past in continual fear that that would come which now had come.

His rage and terror knew no bounds. Fancying Thurnall a merely mean and self-interested worldling, untouched by those higher aspirations which stood to him in place of a religion, he imagined him making every possible use of his power; and longed to escape to the uttermost ends of the earth from his old tormentor, whom the very sea would not put out of the way, but must needs cast ashore at his very feet, to plague him afresh.

What a net he had spread around his own feet, by one act of foolish vanity! He had taken his present name, merely as a *nom de guerre*, when first he came to London as a penniless and friendless scribbler. It would hide him from the ridicule (and, as he fancied, spite) of Thurnall, whom he dreaded meeting every time he walked London streets, and who was for years, to his melancholic and too intense fancy, his *bête noir*, his Frankenstein's familiar. Beside, he was ashamed of the name of Briggs. It certainly is not an euphonious or aristocratic name; and "The Soul's Agonies, by John Briggs," would not have sounded as well as "The Soul's Agonies, by Elsley Vavasour." Vavasour was a very pretty name, and one of those which is supposed by novelists and young ladies to be aristocratic;—why so is a puzzle; as its plain meaning is a tenant-farmer, and nothing more nor less. So he had played with the name till he became fond of it, and considered that he had a right to it, through seven long years of weary struggles, penury, disappointment, as he climbed the Parnassian Mount, writing for magazines and newspapers, sub-editing this periodical and that; till he began to be known as a

ready, graceful, and trustworthy workman, and was befriended by one kind-hearted *littérateur* after another. For in London, at this moment, any young man of real power will find friends enough, and too many, among his fellow bookwrights, and is more likely to have his head turned by flattery, than his heart crushed by envy. Of course, whatsoever flattery he may receive, he is expected to return; and whatsoever clique he may be tossed into on his *début*, he is expected to stand by, and fight for, against the universe; but that is but fair. If a young gentleman, invited to enrol himself in the Mutual-puffery Society which meets every Monday and Friday in Hatchgoose the publisher's drawing-room, is willing to pledge himself thereto in the mystic cup of tea, is he not as solemnly bound thenceforth to support those literary Catilines in their efforts for the subversion of common sense, good taste, and established things in general, as if he had pledged them, as he would have done in Rome of old, in his own life-blood? Bound he is, alike by honour and by green tea; and it will be better for him to fulfil his bond. For if association is the cardinal principle of the age, will it not work as well in book-making as in clothes-making? And shall not the motto of the poet (who will also do a little reviewing on the sly) be henceforth that which shines triumphant over all the world, on many a valiant Scotchman's shield—

"Caw me, and I'll caw thee"?

But to do John Briggs justice, he kept his hands, and his heart also, cleaner than most men do, during this stage of his career. After the first excitement of novelty, and of mixing with people who could really talk and think, and who freely spoke out whatever was in them, right or wrong, in language which at least sounded grand and deep, he began to find in the literary world about the same satisfaction for his inner life which he would have found in the sporting world, or the commercial world, or the religious world, or the fashionable world, or any other world, and to suspect strongly that wheresoever a world is, the flesh and the devil are not very far off. Tired of talking when he wanted to think, of asserting when he wanted to discover, and of hearing his neighbours do the same; tired of little meannesses, envyings, intrigues, jobberies (for the literary world, too, has its jobs), he had been for some time withdrawing himself from the Hatchgoose soirées into his own thoughts, when his "Soul's Agonies" appeared, and he found himself, if not a lion, at least a lion's cub.

There is a house or two in Town where you may meet, on certain evenings, everybody; where duchesses and unfledged poets, bishops and red republican refugees, fox-hunting noblemen

and briefless barristers who have taken to politics, are jumbled together for a couple of hours, to make what they can out of each other, to the exceeding benefit of them all. For each and every one of them finds his neighbour a pleasanter person than he expected; and none need leave those rooms without knowing something more than he did when he came in, and taking an interest in some human being who may need that interest. To one of these houses, no matter which, Elsley was invited on the strength of the "Soul's Agonies;" found himself, for the first time, face to face with high-bred Englishwomen; and fancied—small blame to him—that he was come to the mountains of the Peris, and to Fairy Land itself. He had been flattered already: but never with such grace, such sympathy, or such seeming understanding; for there are few high-bred women who cannot seem to understand, and delude a hapless genius into a belief in their own surpassing brilliance and penetration, while they are cunningly retailing again to him the thoughts which they have caught up from the man to whom they spoke last; perhaps—for this is the very triumph of their art—from the very man to whom they are speaking. Small blame to bashful, clumsy John Briggs, if he did not know his own children; and could not recognise his own stammered and fragmentary fancies, when they were re-echoed to him the next minute, in the prettiest shape, and with the most delicate articulation, from lips which (like those in the fairy tale) never opened without dropping pearls and diamonds.

Oh, what a contrast, in the eyes of a man whose sense of beauty and grace, whether physical or intellectual, was true and deep, to that ghastly ring of prophetesses in the Hatchgoose drawing-room; strong-minded and emancipated women, who prided themselves on having cast off conventionalities, and on being rude, and awkward, and dogmatic, and irreverent, and sometimes slightly improper; women who had missions to mend everything in heaven and earth, except themselves; who had quarrelled with their husbands, and had therefore felt a mission to assert women's rights, and reform marriage in general; or who had never been able to get married at all, and therefore were especially competent to promulgate a model method of educating the children whom they never had had; women who wrote poetry about Lady Blanches whom they never had met, and novels about male and female blackguards whom (one hopes) they never had met, or about whom (if they had) decent women would have held their peace; and every one of whom had, in obedience to Emerson, "followed her impulses," and despised fashion, and was accordingly clothed and bedizened as was right in the sight of her own eyes, and probably in those of no one else.

No wonder that Elsley, ere long, began drawing comparisons, and using his wit upon ancient patronesses, of course behind their backs, likening them to idols fresh from the car of Juggernaut, or from the stern of a South-sea canoe; or, most of all, to that famous wooden image of Freya, which once leapt lumbering forth from her bullock-cart, creaking and rattling in every oaken joint, to belabour the too daring Viking who was flirting with her priestess. Even so, whispered Elsley, did those brains and tongues creak and rattle, lumbering before the blasts of Pythonic inspiration; and so, he verily believed, would the awkward arms and legs have done likewise, if one of the Pythonesses had ever so far degraded herself as to dance.

No wonder, then, that those gifted dames had soon to complain of Elsley Vavasour as a traitor to the cause of progress and civilization; a renegade who had fled to the camp of aristocracy, flunkeydom, obscurantism, frivolity, and dissipation; though there was not one of them but would have given an eye—perhaps no great loss to the aggregate loveliness of the universe—for one of his invitations to 999, Cavendish Street south-east, with the chance of being presented to the Duchess of Lyonesse.

To do Elsley justice, one reason why he liked his new acquaintances so well was, that they liked him. He behaved well himself, and therefore people behaved well to him. He was, as I have said, a very handsome fellow in his way; therefore it was easy to him, as it is to all physically beautiful persons, to acquire a graceful manner. Moreover, he had steeped his whole soul in old poetry, and especially in Spenser's Faëry Queen. Good for him, had he followed every lesson which he might have learnt out of that most noble of English books: but one lesson at least he learnt from it; and that was, to be chivalrous, tender, and courteous to all women, however old or ugly, simply because they were women. The Hatchgoose Pythonesses did not wish to be women, but very bad imitations of men; and therefore he considered himself absolved from all knightly duties toward them: but toward these Peris of the west, and to the dowagers who had been Peris in their time, what adoration could be too great? So he bowed down and worshipped; and, on the whole, he was quite right in so doing. Moreover, he had the good sense to discover, that though the young Peris were the prettiest to look at, the elder Peris were the better company: and that it is, in general, from married women that a poet or any one else will ever learn what woman's heart is like. And so well did he carry out his creed, that before his first summer was over he had quite captivated the heart of old Lady Knockdown, aunt to Lucia St. Just, and wife to Lucia's guardian; a charming old Irishwoman, who affected a pretty brogue, perhaps for the

same reason that she wore a wig, and who had been, in her day, a beauty and a blue, a friend of the Miss Berrys, and Tommy Moore, and Grattan, and Lord Edward Fitzgerald, and Dan O'Connell, and all other lions and lionesses which had roared for the last sixty years about the Emerald Isle. There was no one whom she did not know, and nothing she could not talk about. Married up, when a girl, to a man for whom she did not care, and having no children, she had indemnified herself by many flirtations, and the writing of two or three novels, in which she penned on paper the superfluous feeling which had no vent in real life. She had deserted, as she grew old, the novel for unfulfilled prophecy; and was a distinguished leader in a distinguished religious coterie: but she still prided herself upon having a green head upon grey shoulders; and not without reason; for underneath all the worldliness and intrigue, and petty affectation of girlishness, which she contrived to jumble in with her religiosity, beat a young and kindly heart. So she was charmed with Mr. Vavasour's manners, and commended them much to Lucia, who, a shrinking girl of seventeen, was peeping at her first season from under Lady Knockdown's sheltering wing.

"Me dear, let Mr. Vavasour be who he will, he has not only the intellect of a true genius, but what is a great deal better for practical purposes; that is, the manners of one. Give me the man who will let a woman of our rank say what we like to him, without supposing that he may say what he likes in return; and considers one's familiarity as an honour, and not as an excuse for taking liberties. A most agreeable contrast, indeed, to the young men of the present day; who come in their shooting jackets, and talk slang to their partners,—though really the girls are just as bad,—and stand with their backs to the fire, and smell of smoke, and go to sleep after dinner, and pay no respect to old age, nor to youth either, I think. 'Pon me word, Lucia, the answers I've heard young gentlemen make to young ladies, this very season,—they'd have been called out the next morning in my time, me dear. As for the age of chivalry, nobody expects that to be restored: but really one might have been spared the substitute for it which we had when I was young, in the grand air of the old school. It was a 'sham,' I daresay, as they call everything now-a-days: but really, me dear, a pleasant sham is better to live with than an unpleasant reality, especially when it smells of cigars."

So it befell that Elsley Vavasour was asked to Lady Knockdown's, and that there he fell in love with Lucia, and Lucia fell in love with him.

The next winter, old Lord Knockdown, who had been decrepit

for some years past, died; and his widow, whose income was under five hundred a year,—for the estates were entailed, and mortgaged, and everything else which can happen to an Irish property,—came to live with her nephew, Lord Scoutbush, in Eaton Square, and take such care as she could of Lucia and Valencia.

So, after a dreary autumn and winter of parting and silence, Elsley found himself the next season invited to Eaton Square; there the mischief, if mischief it was, was done; and Elsley and Lucia started in life upon two hundred a year. He had inherited some fifty of his own; she had about a hundred and fifty, which, indeed, was not yet her own by right; but little Scoutbush (who was her sole surviving guardian) behaved on the whole very well for a young gentleman of twenty-two, in a state of fury and astonishment. The old Lord had, wisely enough, settled in his will that Lucia was to enjoy the interest of her fortune from the time that she came out, provided she did not marry without her guardian's leave; and Scoutbush, to avoid esclandre and misery, thought it as well to waive the proviso, and paid her her dividends as usual.

But how had she contrived to marry at all without his leave? That is an ugly question. I will not say that she had told a falsehood, or that Elsley had forsworn himself when he got the licence: but certainly both of them were guilty of something very like a white lie, when they declared that Lucia had the consent of her sole surviving guardian, on the strength of an half-angry, half-jesting expression of Scoutbush's, that she might marry whom she chose, provided she did not plague him. In the first triumph of success and intoxication of wedded bliss, Lucia had written him a saucy letter, reminding him of his permission, and saying that she had taken him at his word: but her conscience smote her; and Elsley's smote him likewise; and smote him all the more, because he had been married under a false name, a fact which might have ugly consequences in law which he did not like to contemplate. To do him justice, he had been, half-a-dozen times during his courtship, on the point of telling Lucia his real name and history. Happy for him had he done so, whatever might have been the consequences: but he wanted moral courage; the hideous sound of Briggs had become horrible to him; and once his foolish heart was frightened away from honesty, just as honesty was on the point of conquering, by old Lady Knockdown's saying that she could never have married a man with an ugly name, or let Lucia marry one.

"Conceive becoming Mrs. Natty Bumppo, me dear, even for twenty thousand a year. If you could summon up courage to

do the deed, I couldn't summon up courage to continue my correspondence with ye."

Elsley knew that that was a lie; that the old lady would have let her marry the most triumphant snob in England, if he had half that income: but unfortunately Lucia capped her aunt's nonsense with "There is no fear of my ever marrying any one who has not a graceful name," and a look at Vavasour, which said—"And you have one, and therefore I—" For the matter had then been settled between them. This was too much for his vanity, and too much, also, for his fears of losing Lucia by confessing the truth. So Elsley went on, ashamed of his real name, ashamed of having concealed it, ashamed of being afraid that it would be discovered,—in a triple complication of shame, which made him gradually, as it makes every man, moody, suspicious, apt to take offence where none is meant. Besides, they were very poor. He, though neither extravagant nor profligate, was, like most literary men who are accustomed to live from hand to mouth, careless, self-indulgent, unmethodical. She knew as much of housekeeping as the Queen of Oude does; and her charming little dreams of shopping for herself were rudely enough broken, ere the first week was out, by the horrified looks of Clara, when she returned from her first morning's marketing for the weekly consumption, with nothing but a woodcock, some truffles, and a bunch of celery. Then the landlady of the lodgings robbed her, even under the nose of the faithful Clara, who knew as little about housekeeping as her mistress; and Clara, faithful as she was, repaid herself by grumbling and taking liberties for being degraded from the luxurious post of lady's maid to that of servant of all work, with a landlady and "marchioness" to wrestle with all day long. Then, what with imprudence and anxiety, Lucia of course lost her first child: and after that came months of illness, during which Elsley tended her, it must be said for him, as lovingly as a mother; and perhaps they were both really happier during that time of sorrow than they had been in all the delirious bliss of the honeymoon.

Valencia meanwhile defied old Lady Knockdown (whose horror and wrath knew no bounds), and walked off one morning with her maid to see her prodigal sister; a visit which not only brought comfort to the weary heart, but important practical benefits. For going home, she seized upon Scoutbush, and so moved his heart with pathetic pictures of Lucia's unheard-of penury and misery, that his heart was softened; and though he absolutely refused to call on Vavasour, he made him an offer, through Lucia, of Penalva Court for the time being; and thither they went—perhaps the best thing they could have done.

There, of course, they were somewhat more comfortable. A

very cheap country, a comfortable house rent free, and a lovely neighbourhood; were a pleasant change, after dear London lodgings: but it is a question whether the change made Elsley a better man.

In the first place, he became a more idle man. The rich enervating climate began to tell upon his mind, as it did upon Lucia's health. He missed that perpetual spur of nervous excitement, change of society, influx of ever-fresh objects, which makes London, after all, the best place in the world for hard working; and which makes even a walk along the streets an intellectual tonic. In the soft and luxurious West Country, Nature invited him to look at her, and dream; and dream he did, more and more, day by day. He was tired, too—as who would not be?—of the drudgery of writing for his daily bread; and relieved from the importunities of publishers and printers'-devils, he sent up fewer and fewer contributions to the magazines. He would keep his energies for a great work; poetry was, after all, his forte: he would not fritter himself away on prose and periodicals, but would win for himself, &c. &c. If he made a mistake, it was at least a pardonable one.

But Elsley became not only a more idle, but a more morose man. He began to feel the evils of solitude. There was no one near with whom he could hold rational converse, save an antiquarian parson or two; and parsons were not to his taste. So, never measuring his wits against those of his peers, and despising the few men whom he met as inferior to himself, he grew more and more wrapt up in his own thoughts and his own tastes. His own poems, even to the slightest turn of expression, became more and more important to him. He grew more jealous of criticism, more confident in his own little theories, about this and that, more careless of the opinion of his fellow-men, and, as a certain consequence, more unable to bear the little crosses and contradictions of daily life; and as Lucia, having brought one and another child safely into the world, settled down into motherhood, he became less and less attentive to her, and more and more attentive to that self which was fast becoming the centre of his universe.

True, there were excuses for him; for whom are there none? He was poor and struggling; and it is much more difficult (as Becky Sharp, I think, pathetically observes) to be good when one is poor than when one is rich. It is (and all rich people should consider the fact) much more easy, if not to go to heaven, at least to think one is going thither, on three thousand a year, than on three hundred. Not only is respectability more easy, as is proved by the broad fact that it is the poor people who fill the gaols, and not the rich ones: but virtue, and religion—of the

popular sort. It is undeniably more easy to be resigned to the will of Heaven, when that will seems tending just as we would have it; much more easy to have faith in the goodness of Providence, when that goodness seems safe in one's pocket in the form of bank-notes; and to believe that one's children are under the protection of Omnipotence, when one can hire for them in half an hour the best medical advice in London. One need only look into one's own heart to understand the disciples' astonishment at the news, that "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven."

"Who then can be saved?" asked they, being poor men, accustomed to see the wealthy Pharisees in possession of "the highest religious privileges, and means of grace." Who, indeed, if not the rich? If the noblemen, and the bankers, and the dowagers, and the young ladies who go to church, and read good books, and have been supplied from youth with the very best religious articles which money can procure, and have time for all manner of good works, and give their hundreds to charities, and head reformatory movements, and build churches, and work altar-cloths, and can taste all the preachers and father-confessors round London, one after another, as you would taste wines, till they find the spiritual panacea which exactly suits their complaint—if they are not sure of salvation, who can be saved?

Without further comment, the fact is left for the consideration of all readers: only let them not be too hard upon Elsley and Lucia, if, finding themselves sometimes literally at their wits' end, they went beyond their poor wits into the region where foolish things are said and done.

Moreover, Elsley's ill-temper (as well as Lucia's) had its excuses in physical ill-health. Poor fellow! Long years of sedentary work had begun to tell upon him; and while Tom Thurnall's chest, under the influence of hard work and oxygen, measured round perhaps six inches more than it had done sixteen years ago, Elsley's, thanks to stooping and carbonic acid, measured six inches less. Short breath, lassitude, loss of appetite, heartburn, and all that fair company of miseries which Mr. Cockle and his Antibilious Pills profess to cure, are no cheering bosom friends; but when a man's breast-bone is gradually growing into his stomach, they will make their appearance; and small blame to him whose temper suffers from their gentle hints that he has a mortal body as well as an immortal soul.

But most fretting of all was the discovery that Lucia knew—if not all about his original name—still enough to keep him in dread lest she should learn more.

It was now twelve months and more that this new terror had leapt up and stared in his face. He had left a letter about—a thing which he was apt to do—in which the Whitbury lawyer made some allusions to his little property; and he was sure that Lucia had seen it: the hated name of Briggs certainly she had not seen; for Elsley had torn it out the moment he opened the letter: but she had seen enough, as he soon found, to be certain that he had, at some time or other, passed under a different name.

If Lucia had been a more thoughtful or high-minded woman, she would have gone straight to her husband, and quietly and lovingly asked him to tell her all: but, in her left-handed Irish fashion, she kept the secret to herself, and thought it a very good joke to have him in her power, and to be able to torment him about that letter when he got out of temper. It never occurred, however, to her that his present name was the feigned one. She fancied that he had, in some youthful escapade, assumed the name to which the lawyer alluded. So the next time he was cross, she tried laughingly the effect of her newly-discovered spell; and was horror-struck at the storm which she evoked. In a voice of thunder, Elsley commanded her never to mention the subject again; and showed such signs of terror and remorse, that she obeyed him from that day forth, except when now and then she lost her temper as completely, too, as he. Little she thought, in her heedlessness, what a dark cloud of fear and suspicion, ever deepening and spreading, she had put between his heart and hers.

But if Elsley had dreaded her knowledge of his story, he dreaded ten times more Tom's knowledge of it. What if Thurnall should tell Lucia? What if Lucia should make a confidant of Thurnall? Women told their doctors everything; and Lucia, he knew too well, had cause to complain of him. Perhaps, thought he, maddened into wild suspicion by the sense of his own wrong-doing, she might complain of him; she might combine with Thurnall against him—for what purpose he knew not: but the wildest imaginations flashed across him, as he hurried desperately home, intending as soon as he got there to forbid Lucia's ever calling in his dreaded enemy. No, Thurnall should never cross his door again! On that one point he was determined, but on nothing else.

However, his intention was never fulfilled. For long before he reached home he began to feel himself thoroughly ill. His was a temperament upon which mental anxiety acts rapidly and severely; and the burning sun, and his rapid walk, combined with rage and terror to give him such a "turn" that, as he hurried down the lane, he found himself reeling like a drunken

man. He had just time to hurry through the garden, and into his study, when pulse and sense failed him, and he rolled over on the sofa in a dead faint.

Lucia had seen him come in, and heard him fall, and rushed in. The poor little thing was at her wits' end, and thought that he had had nothing less than a *coup-de-soleil*. And when he recovered from his faintness, he began to be so horribly ill, that Clara, who had been called in to help, had some grounds for the degrading hypothesis (for which Lucia all but boxed her ears) that "Master had got away into the woods, and gone eating toad-stools, or some such poisonous stuff;" for he lay a full half-hour on the sofa, death-cold, and almost pulseless; moaning, shuddering, hiding his face in his hands, and refusing cordials, medicines, and, above all, a doctor's visit.

However, this could not be allowed to last. Without Elsley's knowledge, a messenger was despatched for Thurnall, and luckily met him in the lane; for he was returning to the town in the footsteps of his victim.

Elsley's horror was complete, when the door opened, and Lucia brought in none other than his tormentor.

"My dearest Elsley, I have sent for Mr. Thurnall. I knew you would not let me, if I told you; but you see I have done it, and now you must really speak to him."

Elsley's first impulse was to motion them both away angrily; but the thought that he was in Thurnall's power stopped him. He must not show his disgust. What if Lucia were to ask its cause, even to guess it? for to his fears even that seemed possible. A fresh misery! Just because he shrank so intensely from the man, he must endure him!

"There is nothing the matter with me," said he languidly.

"I should be the best judge of that, after what Mrs. Vavasour has just told me," said Tom, in his most professional and civil voice; and slipped, cat-like, into a seat beside the unresisting poet.

He asked question on question: but Elsley gave such unsatisfactory answers, that Lucia had to detail everything afresh for him, with—"You know, Mr. Thurnall, he is always overtasking his brain, and will never confess himself ill,"—and all a woman's anxious comments.

Rogue Tom knew all the while well enough what was the cause: but he saw, too, that Elsley was very ill. He felt that he must have the matter out at once; and, by a side glance, sent the obedient Lucia out of the room to get a table-spoonful of brandy.

"Now, my dear Sir, that we are alone," began he blandly.

"Now, Sir!" answered Vavasour, springing off the sofa, his

whole pent-up wrath exploding in hissing steam, the moment the safety-valve was lifted. "Now, Sir! What—what is the meaning of this insolence, this intrusion?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Vavasour," answered Tom, rising, in a tone of bland and stolid surprise.

"What do you want here, with your mummery and medicine, when you know the cause of my malady well enough already? Go, Sir! and leave me to myself."

"My dear Sir," said Tom firmly, "you seem to have forgotten what passed between us this morning."

"Will you insult me beyond endurance?" cried Elsley.

"I told you that, as long as you chose, you were Elsley Vavasour, and I the country doctor. We have met in that character. Why not sustain it? You are really ill; and if I know the cause, I am all the more likely to know the cure."

"Cure?"

"Why not? Believe me, it is in your power to become a much happier man, simply by becoming a healthier one."

"Impertinence!"

"Pish! What can I gain by being impertinent, Sir? I know very well that you have received a severe shock; but I know equally well, that if you were as you ought to be, you would not feel it in this way. When one sees a man in the state of prostration in which you are, common sense tells one that the body must have been neglected, for the mind to gain such power over it."

Elsley replied with a grunt; but Tom went on, bland and imperturbable.

"Believe me, it may be a very materialist view of things: but fact is fact—the *corpus sanum* is father to the *mens sana*—tonics and exercise make the ills of life look marvellously smaller. You have the frame of a strong and active man; and all you want to make you light-hearted and cheerful, is to develop what nature has given you."

"It is too late," said Elsley, pleased, as most men are, by being told that they might be strong and active.

"Not in the least. Three months would strengthen your muscles, open your chest again, settle your digestion, and make you as fresh as a lark, and able to sing like one. Believe me, the poetry would be the better for it, as well as the stomach. Now, positively, I shall begin questioning you."

So Elsley was won to detail the symptoms of internal *malaise*, which he was only too much in the habit of watching himself; but there were some among them which Tom could not quite account for on the ground of mere effeminate habits. A thought struck him.

"You sleep ill, I suppose?" said he carelessly.

"Very ill."

"Did you ever try opiates?"

"No—yes—that is, sometimes."

"Ah!" said Tom, more carelessly still, for he wished to hide, by all means, the importance of the confession. "Well, they give relief for a time: but they are dangerous things—disorder the digestion, and have their revenge on the nerves next morning, as spitefully as brandy itself. Much better try a glass of strong ale or porter just before going to bed. I've known it give sleep, even in consumption—try it, and exercise. You shoot?"

"No."

"Pity; there ought to be noble cocking in these woods. However, the season's past. You fish?"

"No."

"Pity again. I hear Alva is full of trout. Why not try sailing? Nothing oxygenates the lungs like a sail, and your friends the fishermen would be delighted to have you as supercargo. They are always full of your stories to them, and your picking their brains for old legends and adventures."

"They are noble fellows, and I want no better company; but, unfortunately, I am always sea-sick."

"Ah! wholesome, but unpleasant: you are fond of gardening?"

"Very; but stooping makes my head swim."

"True, and I don't want you to stoop. I hope to see you soon as erect as a Guardsman. Why not try walks?"

"Abominable bores—lonely, aimless—"

"Well, perhaps you're right. I never knew but three men who took long constitutionals on principle, and two of them were cracked. But why not try a companion; and persuade that Curate, who needs just the same medicine as you, to accompany you? I don't know a more gentleman-like, agreeable, well-informed man than he is."

"Thank you. I can choose my acquaintances for myself."

"You touchy ass!" said Thurnall to himself. "If we were in the blessed state of nature now, wouldn't I give you ten minutes' double thonging, and then set you to work, as the runaway nigger did his master, Bird o' freedom Sawin, till you'd learnt a thing or two." But blandly still he went on.

"Try the dumb-bells then. Nothing like them for opening your chest. And do get a high desk made, and stand to your writing instead of sitting." And Tom actually made Vavasour promise to do both, and bade him farewell with—

"Now, I'll send you up a little tonic; and trouble you with no more visits till you send for me. I shall see by one glance

at your face whether you are following my prescriptions. And, I say, I wouldn't meddle with those opiates any more; try good malt and hops instead."

"Those who drink beer, think beer," said Elsley, smiling; for he was getting more hopeful of himself, and his terrors were vanishing beneath Tom's skilful management.

"And those who drink water, think water. The Elizabethans,—Sidney and Shakspeare, Burleigh and Queen Bess, worked on beef and ale,—and you would not class them among the muddle-headed of the earth: Believe me, to write well, you must live well. If you take it out of your brain, you must put it in again. It's a question of fact. Try it for yourself." And off Tom went; while Lucia rushed back to her husband, covered him with caresses, assured him that he was seven times as ill as he really was, and so nursed and petted him, that he felt himself, for that time at least, a beast and a fool for having suspected her for a moment. Ah, woman, if you only knew how you carry our hearts in your hands, and would but use your power for our benefit, what angels you might make us all!

"So," said Tom, as he went home, "he has found his way to the elevation-bottle, has he, as well as Mrs. Heale? It's no concern of mine: but as a professional man, I must stop that. You will certainly be no credit to me if you kill yourself under my hands."

Tom went straight home, showed the blacksmith how to make a pair of dumb-bells, covered them himself with leather, and sent them up the next morning with directions to be used for half an hour morning and evening.

And something—whether it was the dumb-bells, or the tonic, or wholesome fear of the terrible doctor—kept Elsley for the next month in better spirits and temper than he had been in for a long while.

Moreover, Tom set Lucia to coax him into walking with Headley. She succeeded at last; and, on the whole, each of them soon found that he had something to learn from the other. Elsley improved daily in health, and Lucia wrote to Valencia flaming accounts of the wonderful doctor who had been cast on shore in their world's end; and received from her after a while this, amid much more—for fancy is not exuberant enough to reproduce the whole of a young lady's letter.

"— I am so ashamed. I ought to have told you of that doctor a fortnight ago; but, rattle-pate as I am, I forgot all about it. Do you know, he is Sabina Mellot's dearest friend; and she begged me to recommend him to you: but I put it off, and then it slipped my memory, like everything else good. She has told me the most wonderful stories of his courage and good-

ness; and conceive—she and her husband were taken prisoners with him by the savages in the South Seas, and going to be eaten, she says: but he helped them to escape in a canoe—such a story—and lived with them for three months on the most beautiful desert island—it is all like a fairy tale. I'll tell it you when I come, darling—which I shall do in a fortnight, and we shall be all so happy. I have such a box ready for you and the chicks, which I shall bring with me; and some pretty things from Scoutbush beside, who is very low, poor fellow, I cannot conceive what about: but wonderfully tender about you. I fancy he must be in love; for he stood up the other day about you to my aunt, quite solemnly, with, 'Let her alone, my lady. She's not the first whom love has made a fool of, and she won't be the last: and I believe that some of the moves which look most foolish, turn out best after all. Live and let live; everybody knows his own business best; anything is better than marriage without real affection.' Conceive my astonishment at hearing the dear little fellow turn sage in that way!

"By the way, I have had to quote his own advice against him; for I have refused Lord Chalkclere after all. I told him (C. not S.), that he was much too good for me; far too perfect and complete a person; that I preferred a husband whom I could break in for myself, even though he gave me a little trouble. Scoutbush was cross at first; but he said afterwards that it was just like Baby Blake (the wretch always calls me Baby Blake now, after that dreadful girl in Lever's Novel); and I told him frankly that it was, if he meant that I had sooner break in a thorough-bred for myself, even though I had a fall or two in the process, than jog along on the most finished little pony on earth, who would never go out of an amble. Lord Chalkclere may be very finished, and learned, and excellent, and so forth: but, *ma chère*, I want, not a white rabbit (of which he always reminds me), but a hero, even though he be a naughty one. I always fancy people must be very little if they can be finished off so rapidly; if there was any real verve in them, they would take somewhat longer to grow. Lord Chalkclere would do very well to bind in Russian leather, and put on one's library shelves, to be consulted when one forgot a date; but really even your Ulysses of a doctor—provided, of course, he turned out a prince in disguise, and don't leave out his h's—would be more to the taste of your naughtiest of sisters."

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CHAPTER XII.

A PEER IN TROUBLE.

SOMEWHERE in those days, so it seems, did Mr. Bowie call unto himself a cab at the barrack-gate, and, dressed in his best array, repair to the wilds of Brompton, and request to see either Claude or Mrs. Mellot.

Bowie is an ex-Scots-Fusilier, who, damaged by the kick of a horse, has acted as valet, first to Scoutbush's father, and next to Scoutbush himself. He is of a patronising habit of mind, as befits a tolerably "leeterary" Scotsman of forty-five years of age and six-feet three in height, who has full confidence in the integrity of his own virtue, the infallibility of his own opinion, and the strength of his own right arm; for Bowie, though he has a rib or two "dinged in," is mighty still as Theseus' self; and both astonished his red-bearded compatriots, and won money for his master, by his prowess in the late feat of arms at Holland House.

Mr. Bowie is asked to walk into Sabina's boudoir (for Claude is out in the garden), to sit down, and deliver his message; which he does after a due military salute, sitting bolt upright in his chair, and in a solemn and sonorous voice.

"Well, Madam, it's just this, that his lordship would be very glad to see ye and Mr. Mellot, for he's vary ill indeed, and that's truth; and if he winna tell ye the cause, then I will—and it's just a' for love of this play-acting body here, and more's the pity."

"More's the pity, indeed!"

"And it's my opeenion the puir laddie will just die, if nobody sees to him; and I've taken the liberty of writing to Major Cawmill mysel', to beg him to come up and see to him, for it's a pity to see his lordship cast away, for want of an understanding body to advise him."

"So I am not an understanding body, Bowie?"

"Oh, Madam, ye're young and bonny," says Bowie, in a tone in which admiration is not unmingled with pity.

"Young indeed! Mr. Bowie, do you know that I am almost as old as you?"

"Hoot, hut, hut—" says Bowie, looking at the wax like complexion and bright hawk-eyes.

"Really I am. I'm past five-and-thirty this many a day."

"Weel, then, Madam, if you'll excuse me, ye're old enough to be wiser than to let his lordship be inveigled with any such play-acting."

"Really he's not inveigled," says Sabina, laughing. "It is all his own fault, and I have warned him how absurd and impossible it is. She has refused even to see him; and you know yourself he has not been near our house for these three weeks."

"Ah, Madam, you'll excuse me: but that's the way with that sort of people, just to draw back and draw back, to make a poor young gentlemen follow them all the keener, as a trout does a minnow, the faster you spin it."

"I assure you no. I can't let you into ladies' secrets: but there is no more chance of her listening to him than of me. And as for me, I have been trying all the spring to marry him to a young lady with eighty thousand pounds; so you can't complain of me."

"Eh? No. That's more like and fitting."

"Well, now. Tell his lordship that we are coming; and trust us, Mr. Bowie: we do not look very villainous, do we?"

"Faith, 'deed then, and I suppose not," said Bowie, using the verb which, in his cautious, Scottish tongue, expresses complete certainty. The truth is, that Bowie adores both Sabina and her husband, who are, he says, "just fit to be put under a glass case on the sideboard, like twa wee china angels."

In half an hour they were in Scoutbush's rooms. They found the little man lying on his sofa, in his dressing-gown, looking pale and pitiable enough. He had been trying to read; for the table by him was covered with books: but either gunnery and mathematics had injured his eyes, or he had been crying; Sabina inclined to the latter opinion.

"This is very kind of you both; but I don't want you, Claude. I want Mrs. Mellot. You go to the window with Bowie."

Bowie and Claude shrugged their shoulders at each other, and departed.

"Now Mrs. Mellot, I can't help looking up to you as a mother."

"Complimentary to my youth," says Sabina, who always calls herself young when she is called old, and old when she is called young.

"I didn't mean to be rude. But one does long to open one's heart. I never had any mother to talk to, you know; and I can't tell my aunt; and Valencia is so flighty; and I thought you would give me one chance more. Don't laugh at me, I say. I am really past laughing at."

"I see you are, you poor creature," says Sabina, melting; and

a long conversation follows, while Claude and Bowie exchange confidences, and arrive at no result beyond the undeniable assertion; "it is a very bad job."

Presently Sabina comes out, and Scoutbush calls cheerfully from the sofa:—

"Bowie, get my bath and things to dress; and order me the cab in half an hour. Good-bye, you dear people, I shall never thank you enough."

Away go Claude and Sabina in a hack-cab.

"What have you done?"

"Given him what he entreated for—another chance with Marie."

"It will only madden him all the more. Why let him try, when you know it is hopeless?"

"Why, I had not the heart to refuse, that's the truth; and besides, I don't know that it is hopeless."

"All the naughtier of you, to let him run the chance of making a fool of himself."

"I don't know that he will make such a great fool of himself. As he says, his grandfather married an actress, and why should not he?"

"Simply because she won't marry him."

"And how do you know that, Sir? You fancy that you understand all the women's hearts in England, just because you have found out the secret of managing one little fool."

"Managing her, quotha! Being managed by her, till my quiet house is turned into a perfect volcano of match-making. Why, I thought he was to marry Manchestrina."

"He shall marry who he likes; and if Marie changes her mind, and revenges herself on this American by taking Lord Scoutbush, all I can say is, it will be a just judgment on him. I have no patience with the heartless fellow, going off thus, and never even leaving his address."

"And because you have no patience, you think Marie will have none?"

"What do you know about women's hearts? Leave us to mind our own matters."

"Mr. Bowie will kill you outright, if your plot succeeds."

"No, he won't. I know who Bowie wants to marry; and if he is not good, he shan't have her. Besides, it will be such fun to spite old Lady Knockdown, who always turns up her nose at me. How mad she will be! Here we are at home. Now, I shall go and prepare Marie."

An hour after, Scoutbush was pleading his cause with Marie; and had been met, of course, at starting, with the simple rejoinder,—

"But, my Lord, you would not surely have me marry where I do not love?"

"Oh, of course not; but, you see, people very often get love after they are married:—and I am sure I would do all to make you love me. I know I can't bribe you by promising you carriages and jewels, and all that:—but you should have what you would like—pictures and statues, and books—and all that I can buy—Oh, Madam, I know I am not worthy of you—I never have had any education as you have!"—

Marie smiled a sad smile.

"But I would learn—I know I could—for I am no fool, though I say it: I like all that sort of thing, and—and if I had you to teach me, I should care about nothing else. I have given up all my nonsense since I knew you; indeed I have—I am trying all day long to read—ever since you said something about being useful, and noble, and doing one's work:—I have never forgotten that, Madam, and never shall; and you would find me a pleasant person to live with, I do believe. At all events, I would—oh, Madam—I would be your servant, your dog—I would fetch and carry for you like a negro slave!"

Marie turned pale, and rose.

"Listen to me, my Lord; this must end. You do not know to whom you are speaking. You talk of negro slaves. Know that you are talking to one!"

Scoutbush looked at her in blank astonishment.

"Madam? Excuse me: but my own eyes—"

"You are not to trust them; I tell you fact."

Scoutbush was silent. She misunderstood his silence: but went on steadily.

"I tell you, my Lord, what I expect you to keep secret: and I know that I can trust your honour."

Scoutbush bowed.

"And what I should never have told you, were it not my only chance of curing you of this foolish passion. I am an American slave!"

"Curse them! Who dared make you a slave?" cried Scoutbush, turning as red as a game-cock.

"I was born a slave. My father was a white gentleman of good family: my mother was a quadroon; and therefore I am a slave;—a negress, a runaway slave, my Lord, who, if I returned to America, should be seized, and chained, and scourged, and sold.—Do you understand me?"

"What an infernal shame!" cried Scoutbush, to whom the whole thing appeared simply as a wrong done to Marie

"Well, my Lord?"

"Well, Madam?"

"Does not this fact put the question at rest for ever?"

"No, Madam! What do I know about slaves? No one is a slave in England. No, Madam; all that it does is to make me long to cut half-a-dozen fellows' throats—" and Scoutbush stamped with rage. "No, Madam, you are you: and if you become my viscountess, you take my rank, I trust, and my name is yours, and my family yours; and let me see who dare interfere!"

"But public opinion, my Lord?" said Marie, half-pleased, half-terrified to find the shaft which she had fancied fatal fall harmless at her feet.

"Public opinion? You don't know England, Madam! What's the use of my being a peer, if I can't do what I like, and make public opinion go my way, and not I its? Though I am no great prince, Madam, but only a poor Irish viscount, it's hard if I can't marry whom I like—in reason, that is—and expect all the world to call on her, and treat her as she deserves. Why, Madam, you will have all London at your feet after a season or two, and all the more if they know your story: or if you don't like that, or if fools did talk at first, why we'd go and live quietly at Kilanbaggan, or at Penalva, and you'd have all the tenants looking up to you as a goddess, as I do, Madam.—Oh, Madam, I would go anywhere, live anywhere, only to be with you!"

Marie was deeply affected. Making all allowances for the wilfulness of youth, she could not but see that her origin formed no bar whatever to her marrying a nobleman; and that he honestly believed that it would form none in the opinion of his compeers, if she proved herself worthy of his choice; and, full of new emotions, she burst into tears.

"There, now, you are melting: I knew you would! Madam! Signora!" and Scoutbush advanced to take her hand.

"Never less," cried she, drawing back. "Do not;—you only make me miserable! I tell you it is impossible. I cannot tell you all.—You must not do yourself and yours such an injustice! Go, I tell you!"

Scoutbush still tried to take her hand.

"Go, I entreat you," cried she, at her wits' end, "or I will really ring the bell for Mrs. Mellot!"

"You need not do that, Madam," said he, drawing himself up; "I am not in the habit of being troublesome to ladies, or being turned out of drawing-rooms. I see how it is—" and his tone softened; "you despise me, and think me a vain, frivolous puppy.—Well; I'll do something yet that you shall not despise!" And he turned to go.

"I do not despise you; I think you a generous, high-hearted gentleman—nobleman in all senses."

Scoutbush turned again.

"But, again, impossible! I shall always respect you; but we must never meet again."

She held out her hand. Little Freddy caught and kissed it till he was breathless, and then rushed out, and blundered over Sabina in the next room.

"No hope?"

"None." And though he tried to squeeze his eyes together very tight, the great tears would come dropping down.

Sabina took him to a sofa, and sat him down while he made his little moan.

"I told you that she was in love with the American."

"Then why don't he come back and marry her? Hang him, I'll go after him and make him!" cried Scoutbush, glad of any object on which to vent his wrath.

"You can't, for nobody knows where he is. Now do be good and patient; you will forget all this."

"I shan't!"

"You will; not at first, but gradually; and marry some one really more fit for you."

"Ah, but if I marry her I shan't love her; and then, you know, Mrs. Mellot, I shall go to the bad again, just as much as ever. Oh, I was trying to be steady for her sake!"

"You can be that still."

"Yes, but it's so hard, with nothing to hope for. I'm not fit to take care of myself. I'm fit for nothing, I believe, but to go out and be shot by those Russians; and I'll do it!"

"You must not; you are not strong enough. The doctors would not let you go as you are."

"Then I'll get strong; I'll—"

"You'll go home, and be good."

"Ain't I good now?"

"Yes, you are a good, sensible fellow, and have behaved nobly, and I honour you for it, and Claude shall come and see you every day."

That evening a note came from Scoutbush.

"Dear Mrs. Mellot,—Whom should I find when I went home, but Campbell? I told him all; and he says that you and everybody have done quite right, so I suppose you have; and that I am quite right in trying to get out to the East, so I shall do it. But the doctor says I must rest for six weeks at least. So Campbell has persuaded me to take the yacht, which is at Southampton, and go down to Aberalva, and then round to Snowdon, where I have a little slate-quarry, and get some fishing. Campbell is coming with me, and I wish Claude would come too.

He knows that brother-in-law of mine, Vavasour, I think, and I shall go and make friends with him. I've got very merciful to foolish lovers lately, and Claude can help me to face him; for I am a little afraid of geniuses, you know. So there we'll pick up my sister (she goes down by land this week), and then go on to Snowdon; and Claude can visit his old quarters at the Royal Oak at Bettws, where he and I had that jolly week among the painters. Do let him come, and beg La Signora not to be angry with me. That's all I'll ever ask of her again."

"Poor fellow! But I can't part with you, Claude."

"Let him," said La Cordifiamma. "He will comfort his lordship; and do you come with me."

"Come with you? Where?"

"I will tell you when Claude is gone."

"Claude, go and smoke in the garden. Now?"

"Come with me to Germany, Sabina."

"To Germany? Why on earth to Germany?"

"I—I only said Germany because it came first into my mind. Anywhere for rest; anywhere to be out of that poor man's way."

"He will not trouble you any more; and you will not surely throw up your engagement?"

"Of course not!" said she, half peevishly. "It will be over in a fortnight; and then I must have rest. Don't you see how I want rest?"

Sabina had seen it for some time past. That white cheek had been fading more and more to a wax-like paleness; those black eyes glittered with fierce unhealthy light; and dark rings round them told, not merely of late hours and excitement, but of wild passion and midnight tears. Sabina had seen all, and could not but give way, as Marie went on.

"I must have rest, I tell you! I am beginning—I can confess all to you—to want stimulants. I am beginning to long for brandy and water—pah!—to nerve me up to the excitement of acting, and then for morphine to make me sleep after it. The very eau de Cologne flask tempts me! They say that the fine ladies use it, before a ball, for other purposes than scent. You would not like to see me commence that practice, would you?"

"There is no fear, dear."

"There is fear! You do not know the craving for exhilaration, the capability of self-indulgence, in our wild Tropic blood. Oh, Sabina, I feel at times that I could sink so low—that I could be so wicked, so utterly wicked, if I once began! Take me away, dearest creature, take me away, and let me have fresh air, and fair quiet scenes, and rest—rest—oh, save me, Sabina!" and she put her hands over her face, and burst into tears.

"We will go, then: to the Rhine, shall it be? I have not been there now for these three years, and it will be such fun running about the world by myself once more, and knowing all the while that—" and Sabina stopped; she did not like to remind Marie of the painful contrast between them.

"To the Rhine? Yes. And I shall see the beautiful old world, the old vineyards, and castles, and hills, which he used to tell me of—taught me to read of in those sweet, sweet books of Longfellow's! So gentle, and pure, and calm—so unlike me!"

"Yes, we will see them; and perhaps—"

Marie looked up at her, guessing her thoughts, and blushed scarlet.

"You, too, think then, that—that—" she could not finish her sentence.

Sabina stooped over her, and the two beautiful mouths met.

"There, darling, we need say nothing. We are both women, and can talk without words."

"Then you think there is hope?"

"Hope? Do you fancy that he is gone so very far? or that if he were, I could not hunt him out? Have I wandered half round the world alone for nothing?"

"No, but hope—hope that—"

"Not hope, but certainty; if some one I know had but courage."

"Courage—to do what?"

"To trust him utterly."

Marie covered her face with her hands, and shuddered in every limb.

"You know my story. Did I gain or lose by telling my Claude all?"

"I will!" she cried, looking up pale but firm. "I will!" and she looked steadfastly into the mirror over the chimney-piece, as if trying to court the reappearance of that ugly vision which haunted it, and so to nerve herself to the utmost, and face the whole truth.

In little more than a fortnight, Sabina and Marie, with maid and courier (for Marie was rich now), were away in the old Antwerpen. And Claude was rolling down to Southampton by rail, with Campbell, Scoutbush, and last, but not least, the faithful Bowie; who had under his charge what he described to the puzzled railway-guard as "goads and cleiks, and pirns and creels, and beuks and heuks, enough for a' the cods o' Neufundland."

CHAPTER XIII.

L'HOMME INCOMPRIS.

Elsley went on, between improved health and the fear of Tom Thurnall, a good deal better for the next month. He began to look forward to Valencia's visit with equanimity, and, at last, with interest; and was rather pleased than otherwise when, in the last week of July, a fly drove up to the gate of old Penalva Court, and he handed out therefrom Valencia, and Valencia's maid.

Lucia had discovered that the wind was east, and that she was afraid to go to the gate for fear of catching cold; her real purpose being, that Valencia should meet Elsley first.

"She is so impulsive," thought the good little creature, always plotting about her husband, "that she will rush upon me, and never see him for the first five minutes; and Elsley is so sensitive—how can he be otherwise, in his position, poor dear?" So she refrained herself, like Joseph, and stood at the door till Valencia was half-way down the garden-walk, having taken Elsley's somewhat shyly-offered arm; and then she could refrain herself no longer, and the two women ran upon each other, and kissed, and sobbed, and talked, till Lucia was out of breath; but Valencia was not so easily silenced.

"My darling! and you are looking so much better than I expected; but not quite yourself yet. That naughty baby is killing you, I am sure! And Mr. Vavasour too, I shall begin to call him Elsley to-morrow, if I like him as much as I do now—but he is looking quite thin—wearing himself out with writing so many beautiful books,—that Wreck was perfect! And where are the children?—I must rush upstairs and devour them!—and what a delicious old garden! and clipt yews, too, so dark and romantic, and such dear old-fashioned flowers!—Mr. Vavasour must show me all over it, and over that hanging wood, too. What a duck of a place!—And oh, my dear, I am quite out of breath!"

And so she swept in, with her arm round Lucia's waist; while Elsley stood looking after her, well enough satisfied with her reception of him, and only hoping that the stream of words would slacken after a while.

"What a magnificent creature!" said he to himself. "Who could believe that the three years would make such a change!"

And he was right. The tall lithe girl had bloomed into full glory; and Valencia St. Just, though not delicately beautiful,

was as splendid an Irish damsel as man need look upon, with a grand masque, aquiline features, luxuriant black hair, and—though it was the fag-end of the London season—the unrivalled Irish complexion, as of the fair dame of Kilkenny, whose

> "Lips were like roses, her cheeks were the same,
> Like a dish of fresh strawberries smother'd in crame."

Her figure was perhaps too tall, and somewhat too stout also; but its size was relieved by the delicacy of those hands and feet of which Miss Valencia was most pardonably proud, and by that indescribable lissomeness and lazy grace which Irishwomen inherit, perhaps, with their tinge of southern blood; and when, in half an hour, she reappeared, with broad straw-hat, and gown tucked up *à la bergère* over the striped Welsh petticoat, perhaps to show off the ancles, which only looked the finer for a pair of heavy laced boots, Elsley honestly felt it a pleasure to look at her, and a still greater pleasure to talk to her, and to be talked to by her; while she, bent on making herself agreeable, partly from real good taste, partly from natural good-nature, and partly, too, because she saw in his eyes that he admired her, chatted sentiment about all heaven and earth.

For to Miss Valencia—it is sad to have to say it—admiration had been now, for three years, her daily bread. She had lived in the thickest whirl of the world, and, as most do for a while, found it a very pleasant place.

She had flirted—with how many must not be told; and perhaps with more than one with whom she had no business to flirt. Little Scoutbush had remonstrated with her on some such affair, but she had silenced him with an Irish jest,—"You're a fisherman, Freddy; and when you can't catch salmon, you catch trout; and when you can't catch trout, you'll whip on the shallow for poor little gubbahawns, and say that it is all to keep your hand in—and so do I."

The old ladies said that this was the reason why she had not married; the men, however, asserted that no one dare marry her; and one club-oracle had given it as his opinion that no man in his rational senses was to be allowed to have anything to do with her, till she had been well jilted two or three times, to take the spirit out of her: but that catastrophe had not yet occurred, and Miss Valencia still reigned "triumphant and alone," though her aunt, old Lady Knockdown, moved all the earth, and some dirty places, too, below the earth, to get the wild Irish girl off her hands; "for," quoth she, "I feel with Valencia, indeed, just like one of those men who carry about little dogs in the Quadrant. I always pity the poor men so, and think how happy they must be when they have sold one. It is one chance

less, you know, of having it bite them horribly, and then run away after all."

There was, however, no more real harm in Valencia, than there is in every child of Adam. Town frivolity had not corrupted her. She was giddy, given up to enjoyment of the present: but there was not a touch of meanness about her: and if she was selfish, as every one must needs be whose thoughts are of pleasure, admiration, and success, she was so unintentionally; and she would have been shocked and pained at being told that she was anything but the most kind-hearted and generous creature on earth. Major Campbell, who was her Mentor as well as her brother's, had certainly told her so more than once; at which she had pouted a good deal, and cried a little, and promised to amend; then packed up a heap of cast-off things to send to Lucia—half of it much too fine to be of any use to the quiet little woman; and lastly, gone out and bought fresh finery for herself, and forgot all her good resolutions. Whereby it befell that she was tolerably deep in debt at the end of every season, and had to torment and kiss Scoutbush into paying her bills; which he did, like a good brother, and often before he had paid his own.

But, howsoever full Valencia's head may have been of fine garments and London flirtations, she had too much tact and good feeling to talk that evening of a world of which even Elsley knew more than her sister. For poor Lucia had been but eighteen at the time of her escapade, and had not been presented twelve months; so that she was as "inexperienced" as any one can be, who has only a husband, three children, and a household to manage on less than three hundred a year. Therefore Valencia talked only of things which would interest Elsley; asked him to read his last new poem—which, I need not say, he did; told him how she devoured everything he wrote; planned walks with him in the country; seemed to consult his pleasure in every way.

"To-morrow morning I shall sit with you and the children Lucia; of course I must not interrupt Mr. Vavasour: but really in the afternoon I must ask him to spare a couple of hours from the Muses."

Vavasour was delighted to do anything—"Where would she walk?"

"Where? of course to see the beautiful schoolmistress who saved the man from drowning; and then to see the chasm across which he was swept. I shall understand your poem so much better, you know, if I can but realize the people and the place. And you must take me to see Captain Willis, too, and even the Lieutenant—if he does not smell too much of

brandy. I will be so gracious and civil, quite the lady of the castle."

"You will make quite a royal progress," said Lucia, looking at her with sisterly admiration.

"Yes, I intend to usurp as many of Scoutbush's honours as I can till he comes. I must lay down the sceptre in a fortnight, you know, so I shall make as much use of it as I can meanwhile."

And so on, and so on; meaning all the while to put Elsley quite at his ease, and let him understand that bygones were bygones, and that with her any reconciliation at all was meant to be a complete one; which was wise and right enough. But Valencia had not counted on the excitable and vain nature with which she was dealing; and Lucia, who had her own fears from the first evening, was the last person in the world to tell her of it; first from pride in herself, and then from pride in her husband. For even if a woman has made a foolish match, it is hard to expect her to confess as much; and, after all, a husband is a husband, and let his faults be what they might, he was still her Elsley; her idol once; and perhaps (so she hoped) her idol again hereafter, and if not, still he was her husband, and that was enough.

"By which you mean, Sir, that she considered herself bound to endure everything and anything from him, simply because she had been married to him in church?"

Yes, and a great deal more. Not merely being married in church; but what being married in church means, and what every woman who is a woman understands; and lives up to without flinching, though she die a martyr for it, or a confessor; a far higher saint, if the truth was known, as it will be some day, than all the holy virgins who ever fasted and prayed in a convent since the days when Macarius first turned fakeer. For to a true woman, the mere fact of a man's being her husband, put it on the lowest ground that you choose, is utterly sacred, divine, all-powerful; in the might of which she can conquer self in a way which is an every day miracle; and the man who does not feel about the mere fact of a woman's having given herself utterly to him, just what she herself feels about it, ought to be despised by all his fellows;—were it not that, in that case, it would be necessary to despise more human beings than is safe for the soul of any man.

That fortnight was the sunniest which Elsley had passed, since he made secret love to Lucia in Eaton Square. Romantic walks, the company of a beautiful woman as ready to listen as she was to talk, free licence to pour out all his fancies, sure of admiration, if not of flattery, and pardonably satisfied vanity

—all these are comfortable things for most men, who have nothing better to comfort them. But, on the whole, this feast did not make Elsley a better or wiser man at home. Why should it? Is a boy's digestion improved by turning him loose into a confectioner's shop? And thus the contrast between what he chose to call Valencia's sympathy, and Lucia's want of sympathy, made him, unfortunately, all the more cross to her when they were alone; and who could blame the poor little woman for saying one night, angrily enough:

"Ah, yes! Valencia,—Valencia is imaginative—Valencia understands you—Valencia sympathises—Valencia thinks . . Valencia has no children to wash and dress, no accounts to keep, no linen to mend—Valencia's back does not ache all day long, so that she would be glad enough to lie on the sofa from morning till night, if she was not forced to work whether she can work or not. No, no; don't kiss me, for kisses will not make up for injustice, Elsley. I only trust that you will not tempt me to hate my own sister. No: don't talk to me now, let me sleep if I can sleep; and go and walk and talk sentiment with Valencia to-morrow, and leave the poor little brood hen to sit on her nest, and be despised." And refusing all Elsley's entreaties for pardon, she sulked herself to sleep.

Who can blame her? If there is one thing more provoking than another to a woman, it is to see her husband Strass-engel, Haus-teufel, an angel of courtesy to every woman but herself; to see him in society all smiles and good stories, the most amiable and self-restraining of men; perhaps to be complimented on his agreeableness: and to know all the while that he is penning up all the accumulated ill-temper of the day, to let it out on her when they get home; perhaps in the very carriage as soon as it leaves the door. Hypocrites that you are, some of you gentlemen! Why cannot the act against cruelty to women, corporal punishment included, be brought to bear on such as you? And yet, after all, you are not most to blame in the matter: Eve herself tempts you, as at the beginning; for who does not know that the man is a thousand times vainer than the woman? He does but follow the analogy of all nature. Look at the Red Indian, in that blissful state of nature from which (so philosophers inform those who choose to believe them) we all sprung. Which is the boaster, the strutter, the bedizener of his sinful carcase with feathers and beads, fox-tails and bears' claws,—the brave, or his poor little squaw? An Australian settler's wife bestows on some poor slaving gin a cast-off French bonnet; before she has gone a hundred yards, her husband snatches it off, puts it on his own mop, quiets her for its loss with a tap of the waddie, and struts on in glory. Why not? Has he not the

analogy of all nature on his side? Have not the male birds and the male moths, the fine feathers, while the females go soberly about in drab and brown? Does the lioness, or the lion, rejoice in the grandeur of a mane; the hind, or the stag, in antlered pride? How know we but that, in some more perfect and natural state of society, the women will dress like so many quakeresses; while the frippery shops will become the haunts of men alone, and "browches, pearls and owches" be consecrate to the nobler sex? There are signs already, in the dress of our young gentlemen, of such a return to the law of nature from the present absurd state of things, in which the human peahens carry about the gaudy trains which are the peacocks' right.

For there is a secret feeling in woman's heart that she is in her wrong place; that it is she who ought to worship the man, and not the man her; and when she becomes properly conscious of her destiny, has not he a right to be conscious of his? If the grey hens will stand round in the mire clucking humble admiration, who can blame the old blackcock for dancing and drumming on the top of a moss hag, with outspread wings and flirting tail, glorious and self-glorifying? He is a splendid fellow; and he was made splendid for some purpose, surely? Why did Nature give him his steel-blue coat, and his crimson crest, but for the very same purpose that she gave Mr. A * * * his intellect—to be admired by the other sex? And if young damsels, overflowing with sentiment and Ruskinism, will crowd round him, ask his opinion of this book and that picture, treasure his bon-mots, beg for his autograph, looking all the while the praise which they do not speak (though they speak a good deal of it), and when they go home write letters to him on matters about which in old times girls used to ask only their mothers;—who can blame him if he finds the little wife at home a very uninteresting body, whose head is so full of petty cares and gossip, that he and all his talents are quite unappreciated? *Les femmes incomprises* of France used to (perhaps do now) form a class of married ladies, whose sorrows were especially dear to the novelists, male or female; but what are their woes compared to those of *l'homme incompris?* What higher vocation for a young maiden than to comfort the martyr during his agonies? And, most of all, where the sufferer is not merely a genius, but a saint; persecuted, perhaps, abroad by vulgar tradesmen and Philistine bishops, and snubbed at home by a stupid wife, who is quite unable to appreciate his magnificent projects for regenerating all heaven and earth; and only, humdrum, practical creature that she is, tries to do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with her God? Fly to his help, all pious maidens, and pour into the wounded heart of the holy

man the healing balm of self-conceit; cover his table with confidential letters, choose him as your father-confessor, and lock yourself up alone with him for an hour or two every week, while the wife is mending his shirts upstairs.—True, you may break the stupid wife's heart by year-long misery, as she slaves on, bearing the burden and heat of the day, of which you never dream; keeping the wretched man, by her unassuming good example, from making a fool of himself three times a week; and sowing the seed of which you steal the fruit. What matter? If your immortal soul requires it, what matter what it costs her carnal heart? She will suffer in silence; at least, she will not tell you. You think she does not understand you. Well;—and she thinks in return that you do not understand her, and her married joys and sorrows, and her five children, and her butcher's bills, and her long agony of fear for the husband of whom she is ten times more proud than you could be; for whom she has slaved for years; whose defects she has tried to cure, while she cured her own; for whom she would die to-morrow, did he fall into disgrace, when you had flounced off to find some new idol: and so she will not tell you: and what the ear heareth not, that the heart grieveth not.—Go on and prosper! You may, too, ruin the man's spiritual state by vanity; you may pamper his discontent with the place where God has put him, till he ends by flying off to "some purer Communion," and taking you with him. Never mind. He is a most delightful person, and his intercourse is so improving. Why were sweet things made, but to be eaten? Go on and prosper.

Ah, young ladies, if some people had (as it is perhaps well for them that they have not) the ordering of this same British nation, they would certainly follow your example, and try to restore various ancient institutions. And first among them would be that very ancient institution of the cucking-stool; to be employed however, not as of old, against married scolds (for whom those who have been behind the scenes have all respect and sympathy), but against unmarried prophetesses, who, under whatsoever high pretence of art or religion, flirt with their neighbours' husbands, be they parson or poet.

Not, be it understood, that Valencia had the least suspicion that Elsley considered himself "incompris." If he had hinted the notion to her, she would have resented it as an insult to the St. Justs in general, and to her sister in particular; and would have said something to him in her off-hand way, the like whereof he had seldom heard, even from adverse reviewers.

Elsley himself soon divined enough of her character to see that he must keep his sorrows to himself, if he wished for Valencia's good opinion; and soon,—so easily does a vain man lend himself

to meanness,—he found himself trying to please Valencia, by praising to her the very woman with whom he was discontented. He felt shocked and ashamed when first his own baseness flashed across him: but the bait was too pleasant to be left easily: and, after all, he was trying to say to his guest what he knew his guest would like; and what was that but following those very rules of good society, for breaking which Lucia was always calling him gauche and morose? So he actually quieted his own conscience by the fancy that he was bound to be civil, and to keep up appearances, "even for Lucia's sake," said the self-deceiver to himself. And thus the mischief was done; and the breach between Lucia and her husband, which had been somewhat bridged over during the last month or two, opened more wide than ever, without a suspicion on Valencia's part that she was doing all she could to break her sister's heart.

She, meanwhile, had plenty of reasons which justified her new intimacy to herself. How could she better please Lucia? How better show that bygones were to be bygones, and that Elsley was henceforth to be considered as one of the family, than by being as intimate as possible with him? What matter how intimate? For, after all, he was only a brother, and she his sister.

She had law on her side in that last argument, as well as love of amusement, Whether she had either common sense or Scripture, is a very different question.

Poor Lucia, too, tried to make the best of the matter; and to take the new intimacy as Valencia would have had her take it, in the light of a compliment to herself; and so, in her pride, she said to Valencia, and told her that she should love her for ever for her kindness to Elsley, while her heart was ready to burst.

But ere the fortnight was over the Nemesis had come, and Lucia, woman as she was, could not repress a thrill of malicious joy, even though Elsley became more intolerable than ever at the change.

What was the Nemesis, then?

Simply that this naughty Miss St. Just began to smile upon Frank Headley the curate, even as she had smiled upon Elsley Vavasour.

It was very naughty; but she had her excuses. She had found Elsley out; and it was well for both of them that she had done so. Already, upon the strength of their supposed relationship, she had allowed him to talk a great deal more nonsense to her,—harmless perhaps, but nonsense still,—than she would have listened to from any other man; and it was well for both of them that Elsley was a man without self-control, who began to show the weak side of his character freely enough, as soon as

he became at ease with his companion, and excited by conversation. Valencia quickly saw that he was vain as a peacock, and weak enough to be led by her in any and every direction, when she chose to work on his vanity. And she despised him accordingly, and suspected, too, that her sister could not be very happy with such a man.

None are more quick than sisters-in-law to see faults in the brother-in-law, when once they have begun to look for them; and Valencia soon remarked that Elsley showed Lucia no *petits soins*, while he was ready enough to show them to her; that he took no real trouble about his children, or about anything else; and twenty more faults, which she might have perceived in the first two days of her visit, if she had not been in such a hurry to amuse herself. But she was too delicate to ask Lucia the truth, and contented herself with watching all parties closely, and in amusing herself meanwhile—for amusement she must have—in

> "Breaking a country heart
> For pastime, ere she went to town."

She had met Frank several times about the parish and in the schools, and had been struck at once with his grace and high breeding, and with that air of melancholy which is always interesting in a true woman's eyes. She had seen, too, that Elsley tried to avoid him, naturally enough not wishing an intrusion on their pleasant *têtes-à-tête*. Whereon, half to spite Elsley, and half to show her own right to chat with whom she chose, she made Lucia ask Frank to tea; and next contrived to go to the school when he was teaching there, and to make Elsley ask him to walk with them; and all the more, because she had discovered that Elsley had discontinued his walks with Frank, as soon as she had appeared at Penalva.

Lucia was not sorry to countenance her in her naughtiness; it was a comfort to her to have a fourth person in the room at times, and thus to compel Elsley and Valencia to think of something beside each other; and when she saw her sister gradually transferring her favours from the married to the unmarried victim, she would have been more than woman if she had not rejoiced thereat. Only, she began soon to be afraid for Frank, and at last told Valencia so.

"Do take care that you do not break his heart!"

"My dear! You forget that I sit under Mr. O'Blareaway, and am to him as a heathen and a publican. Fresh from St. Nepomuc's as he is, he would as soon think of falling in love with an 'Oirish Prodestant,' as with a malignant and a turbaned Turk. Besides, my dear, if the mischief is going to be done, it's done already."

"I dare say it is, you naughty beautiful thing. If any body is goose enough to fall in love with you, he'll be also goose enough, I don't doubt, to do so at first sight. There, don't look perpetually in that glass: but take care!"

"What use? If it is going to happen at all, I say, it has happened already; so I shall just please myself, as usual."

And it had happened: and poor Frank had been, ever since the first day he saw Valencia, over head and ears in love. His time had come, and there was no escaping his fate.

But to escape he tried. Convinced, with many good men of all ages and creeds, that a celibate life was the fittest one for a clergyman, he had fled from St. Nepomuc's into the wilderness to avoid temptation, and beheld at his cell-door a fairer fiend than ever came to St. Dunstan. A fairer fiend, no doubt; for St. Dunstan's imagination created his temptress for him, but Valencia was a reality: and fact and nature may be safely backed to produce something more charming than any monk's brain can do. One questions whether St. Dunstan's apparition was not something as coarse as his own mind, clever though that mind was. At least, he would never have had the heart to apply the hot tongs to such a nose as Valencia's, but at most have bowed her out pittyingly, as Frank tried to bow out Valencia from the sacred place of his heart, but failed.

Hard he tried, and humbly too. He had no proud contempt for married parsons. He was ready enough to confess, that he, too, might be weak in that respect, as in a hundred others. He conceived that he had no reason, from his own inner life, to believe himself worthy of any higher vocation—proving his own real nobleness of soul by that very humility. He had rather not marry. He might do so some day: but he would sacrifice much to avoid the necessity. If he was weak, he would use what strength he had to the uttermost ere he yielded. And all the more, because he felt, and reasonably enough, that Valencia was the last woman in the world to make a parson's wife. He had his ideal of what such a wife should be, if she were to be allowed to exist at all—the same ideal which Mr. Paget has drawn in his charming little book (would that all parsons wives would read and perpend), the "Owlet of Owlstone Edge." But Valencia would surely not make a Beatrice. Beautiful she was, glorious, loveable, but not the helpmeet whom he needed. And he fought against the new dream like a brave man. He fasted, he wept, he prayed: but his prayers seemed not to be heard. Valencia seemed to have enthroned herself, a true Venus victrix, in the centre of his heart, and would not be dispossessed. He tried to avoid seeing her: but even for that he had not strength: he went again and again when asked, only to come home more

miserable each time, as fierce against himself and his own weakness as if he had given way to wine or to oaths. In vain, too, he represented to himself the ridiculous hopelessness of his passion; the impossibility of the London beauty ever stooping to marry the poor country curate. Fancies would come in, how such things, strange as they might seem, had happened already; might happen again. It was a class of marriages for which he had always felt a strong dislike, even suspicion and contempt; and though he was far more fitted, in family as well as personal excellence, for such a match, than three out of four who make them, yet he shrunk with disgust from the notion of being himself classed at last among the match-making parsons. Whether there was "carnal pride" or not in that last thought, his soul so loathed it, that he would gladly have thrown up his cure at Aberalva; and would have done so actually, but for one word which Tom Thurnall had spoken to him, and that was—Cholera.

That the cholera might come; that it probably would come, in the course of the next two months, was news to him which was enough to keep him at his post, let what would be the consequence. And gradually he began to see a way out of his difficulty—and a very simple one; and that was, to die.

"That is the solution after all," said he. "I am not strong enough for God's work: but I will not shrink from it, if I can help. If I cannot master it, let it kill me; so at least I may have peace. I have failed utterly here: all my grand plans have crumbled to ashes between my fingers. I find myself a cumberer of the ground, where I fancied that I was going forth like a very Michael—fool that I was!—leader of the armies of heaven. And now, in the one remaining point on which I thought myself strong, I find myself weakest of all. Useless and helpless! I have one chance left, one chance to show these poor souls that I really love them, really wish their good—Selfish that I am! What matter whether I do show it or not? What need to justify myself to them? Self, self, creeping in everywhere! I shall begin next, I suppose, longing for the cholera to come, that I may show off myself in it, and make spiritual capital out of their dying agonies! Ah me! that it were all over!—That this cholera, if it is to come, would wipe out of this head what I verily believe nothing but death will do!" And therewith Frank laid his head on the table, and cried till he could cry no more.

It was not over manly: but he was weakened with overwork and sorrow: and, on the whole, it was perhaps the best thing he could do; for he fell asleep there, with his head on the table, and did not wake till the dawn blazed through his open window.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DOCTOR AT BAY.

Did you ever, in a feverish dream, climb a mountain which grew higher and higher as you climbed; and scramble through passages which changed perpetually before you, and up and down break-neck stairs which broke off perpetually behind you? Did you ever spend the whole night, foot in stirrup, mounting that phantom hunter which never gets mounted, or, if he does, turns into a pen between your knees; or in going to fish that phantom stream which never gets fished? Did you ever, late for that mysterious dinner-party in some enchanted castle, wander disconsolately, in unaccountable rags and dirt, in search of that phantom carpet-bag which never gets found? Did you ever "realize" to yourself the sieve of the Danaides, the stone of Sisyphus, the wheel of Ixion; the pleasure of shearing that domestic animal who (according to the experience of a very ancient observer of nature) produces more cry than wool; the perambulation of that Irishman's model bog, where you slip two steps backward for one forward, and must, therefore, in order to progress at all, turn your face homeward, and progress as a pig does into a steamer, by going the opposite way? Were you ever condemned to spin ropes of sand to all eternity, like Tregeagle the wrecker; or to extract the cube roots of a million or two of hopeless surds, like the mad mathematician; or last, and worst of all, to work the Nuisances Removal Act? Then you can enter, as a man and a brother, into the sorrows of Tom Thurnall, in the months of June and July, 1854.

He had made up his mind, for certain good reasons of his own, that the cholera ought to visit Aberalva in the course of the summer; and, of course, tried his best to persuade people to get ready for their ugly visitor: but in vain. The cholera come there? Why, it never had come yet, which signified, when he inquired a little more closely, that there had been only one or two doubtful cases in 1837, and five or six in 1849. In vain he answered, "Very well; and is not that a proof that the causes of cholera are increasing here? If you had one case the first time, and five times as many the next, by the same rule you will have five times as many more if it comes this summer."

"Nonsense! Aberalva was the healthiest town on the coast."

"Well but," would Tom say, "in the census before last, you had a population of 1,300 in 112 houses, and that was close packing enough, in all conscience: and in the last census I

find you had a population of over 1,400, which must have increased since; and there are eight or nine old houses in the town pulled down, or turned into stores; so you are more closely packed than ever. And mind, it may seem no very great difference; but it is the last drop that fills the cup."

What had that to do with cholera? And more than one gave him to understand that he must be either a very silly or a very impertinent person, to go poking into how many houses there were in the town, and how many people lived in each. Tardrew, the steward, indeed, said openly, that Mr. Thurnall was making disturbance enough in people's property up at Pentremochyn, without bothering himself with Aberalva too. He had no opinion of people who had a finger in everybody's pie. Whom Tom tried to soothe with honeyed words, knowing him to be of the original British bulldog breed, which, once stroked against the hair, shows his teeth at you for ever afterwards.

But staunch was Tardrew, unfortunately on the wrong side; and backed by the collective ignorance, pride, laziness, and superstition of Aberalva, showed to his new assailant that terrible front of stupidity, against which, says Schiller, "the gods themselves fight in vain."

"Does he think we was all fools afore he came here?"

That was the rallying cry of the Conservative party, worshippers of Baalzebub, god of flies, and of that (so say Syrian scholars) from which flies are bred. And, indeed, there were excuses for them, on the Yankee ground, that "there's a deal of human natur' in man." It is hard to human nature to make all the humiliating confessions which must precede sanitary repentance; to say, "I have been a very nasty, dirty fellow. I have lived contented in evil smells, till I care for them no more than my pig does. I have refused to understand Nature's broadest hints, that anything which is so disagreeable is not meant to be left about. I have probably been more or less the cause of half my own illnesses, and of three-fourths of the illness of my children; for aught I know, it is very much my fault that my own baby has died of scarlatina, and two or three of my tenants of typhus. No, hang it! that's too much to make any man confess to! I'll prove my innocence by not reforming!" So sanitary reform is thrust out of sight, simply because its necessity is too humiliating to the pride of all, too frightful to the consciences of many.

Tom went to Trebooze.

"Mr. Trebooze, you are a man of position in the county, and own some houses in Aberalva. Don't you think you could use your influence in this matter?"

"Own some houses? Yes,"—and Mr. Trebooze consigned

the said cottages to a variety of unmentionable places; "cost me more in rates than they bring in in rent, even if I get the rent paid. I should like to get a six-pounder, and blow the whole lot into the sea. Cholera coming, eh? D'ye think it will be there before Michaelmas?"

"I do."

"Pity I can't clear 'em out before Michaelmas. Else I'd have ejected the lot, and pulled the houses down."

"I think something should be done meanwhile, though, towards cleansing them."

"* * * Let 'em cleanse them themselves! Soap's cheap enough with your * * * free trade, ain't it? No, Sir! That sort of talk will do well enough for my Lord Minchampstead, Sir, the old money-lending Jew! * * * but gentlemen, Sir, gentlemen, that are half-ruined with free trade, and your Whig policy, Sir, you must give 'em back their rights before they can afford to throw away their money on cottages. Cottages, indeed! * * * upstart of a cotton-spinner, coming down here, buying the land over our heads, and pretends to show us how to manage our estates; old families that have been in the county this four hundred years, with the finest peasantry in the world ready to die for them, Sir, till these new revolutionary doctrines came in—Pride and purse-proud conceit, just to show off his money! What do they want with better cottages than their fathers had? Only put notions into their heads, raise 'em above their station; more they have, more they'll want. * * * Sir, make chartists of 'em all before he's done! I'll tell you what, Sir,"—and Mr. Trebooze attempted a dignified and dogmatic tone—"I never told it you before, because you were my very good friend, Sir: but my opinion is, Sir, that by what you're doing up at Pentremochyn, you're just spreading chartism—chartism, Sir! Of course I know nothing. Of course I'm nobody, in these days: but that's my opinion, Sir, and you've got it!"

By which motion Tom took little. Mighty is envy always, and mighty ignorance: but you become aware of their truly Titanic grandeur only when you attempt to touch their owner's pocket.

Tom tried old Heale: but took as little in that quarter. Heale had heard of sanitary reform, of course; but he knew nothing about it, and gave a general assent to Tom's doctrines, for fear of exposing his own ignorance: acting on them was a very different matter. It is always hard for an old medical man to confess that anything has been discovered since the days of his youth; and beside, there were other reasons behind, which Heale tried to avoid giving; and therefore fenced off,

and fenced off, till, pressed hard by Tom, wrath came forth, and truth with it.

"And what be you thinking of, Sir, to expect me to offend all my best patients? and not one of 'em but rents some two cottages, some a dozen. And what'll they say to me if I go a routing and rookling in their drains, like an old sow by the wayside, beside putting 'em to all manner of expense? And all on the chance of this cholera coming, which I have no faith in, nor in this new-fangled sanitary reform neither, which is all a dodge for a lot of young Government puppies to fill their pockets, and rule and ride over us: and my opinion always was with the Bible, that 'tis jidgment, Sir, a jidgment of God, and we can't escape His holy will, and that's the plain truth of it."

Tom made no answer to that latter argument. He had heard that "'tis jidgment" from every mouth during the last few days; and had mortally offended the Brianite preacher that very morning, by answering his "'tis jidgment" with—

"But, my good Sir! the Bible, I thought, says that Aaron stayed the plague among the Israelites, and David the one at Jerusalem."

"Sir, those was miracles, Sir! and they was under the Law, Sir, and we'm under the Gospel, you'll be pleased to remember."

"Humph!" said Tom, "then, by your showing, they were better off under the Law than we are now, if they could have their plagues stopped by miracles; and we cannot have ours stopped at all."

"Sir, be you an infidel?"

To which there was no answer to be made.

In this case, Tom answered Heale with—

"But, my dear Sir, if you don't like (as is reasonable enough) to take the responsibility on yourself, why not go to the Board of Guardians, and get them to put the act in force?"

"Boord, Sir? and do you know so little of Boords as that? Why, there ain't one of them but owns cottages themselves, and it's as much as my place is worth—"

"Your place as medical officer is just worth nothing, as you know; you'll have been out of pocket by it seven or eight pounds this year, even if no cholera comes."

Tom knew the whole state of the case; but he liked tormenting Heale now and then.

"Well, Sir! but if I get turned out next year, in steps that Drew over at Carcarrow Churchtown into my district, and into the best of my practice, too. I wonder what sort of a Poor Law district you were medical officer of, if you don't know yet that that's why we take to the poor."

"My dear Sir, I know it, and a good deal more beside."

"Then why go bothering me this way?"

"Why," said Tom, "it's pleasant to have old notions confirmed as often as possible—

> 'Life is a jest, and all things show it;
> I thought so once, but now I know it.'

What an ass the fellow must have been who had that put on his tombstone, not to have found it out many a year before he died!"

He went next to Headley the Curate, and took little by that move; though more than by any other.

For Frank already believed his doctrines, as an educated London parson of course would; was shocked to hear that they were likely to become fact so soon and so fearfully; offered to do all he could: but confessed that he could do nothing.

"I have been hinting to them, ever since I came, improvements in cleanliness, in ventilation, and so forth: but I have been utterly unheeded: and bully me as you will, Doctor, about my cramming doctrines down their throats, and roaring like a Pope's bull, I assure you that, on sanitary reform, my roaring was as of a sucking dove, and ought to have prevailed, if soft persuasion can."

"You were a dove where you ought to have been a bull, and a bull where you ought to have been a dove. But roar now, if ever you roared, in the pulpit and out. Why not preach to them on it next Sunday?"

"Well, I'd give a lecture gladly, if I could get any one to come and hear it; but that you could do better than me."

"I'll lecture them myself, and show them bogies, if my quarter-inch will do its work. If they want seeing to believe, see they shall; I have half-a-dozen specimens of water already which will astonish them. Let me lecture, you must preach."

"You must know, that there is a feeling,—you would call it a prejudice,—against introducing such purely secular subjects into the pulpit."

Tom gave a long whistle.

"Pardon me, Mr. Headley; you are a man of sense; and I can speak to you as one human being to another, which I have seldom been able to do with your respected cloth."

"Say on; I shall not be frightened."

"Well, don't you put up the Ten Commandments in your Church?"

"Yes."

"And don't one of them run: 'Thou shalt not kill.'"

'Well?"

"And is not murder a moral offence—what you call a sin?"

"*Sans doute.*"

"If you saw your parishioners in the habit of cutting each other's throats, or their own, shouldn't you think that a matter spiritual enough to be a fit subject for a little of the drum ecclesiastic?"

"Well?"

"Well? Ill! There are your parishioners about to commit wholesale murder and suicide, and is that a secular question? If they don't know the fact, is not that all the more reason for your telling them of it? You pound away, as I warned you once, at the sins of which they are just as well aware as you; why on earth do you hold your tongue about the sins of which they are not aware? You tell us every Sunday that we do Heaven only knows how many more wrong things than we dream of. Tell it us again now. Don't strain at gnats like want of faith and resignation, and swallow such a camel as twenty or thirty deaths. It's no concern of mine; I've seen plenty of people murdered, and may again: I am accustomed to it; but if it's not your concern, what on earth you are here for is more than I can tell."

"You are right—you are right; but how to put it on religious grounds—"

Tom whistled again.

"If your doctrines cannot be made to fit such plain matters as twenty deaths, *tant pis pour eux.* If they have nothing to say on such scientific facts, why, the facts must take care of themselves, and the doctrines may, for aught I care, go and—But I won't be really rude. Only think over the matter: if you are God's minister, you ought to have something to say about God's view of a fact which certainly involves the lives of his creatures, not by twos and threes, but by tens of thousands."

So Frank went home, and thought it through; and went once and again to Thurnall, and condescended to ask his opinion of what he had said, and whether he said ill or well. What Thurnall answered was—"Whether that's sound Church doctrine is your business; but if it be, I'll say, with the man there in the Acts—what was his name?—'Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.'"

"Would God that you were one! for you would make a right good one."

"Humph! at least you see what you can do, if you'll only face fact as it stands, and talk about the realities of life. I'll puff your sermon beforehand, I assure you, and bring all I can to hear it."

So Frank preached a noble sermon, most rational, and most spiritual withal; but he, too, like his tutor, took little by his motion.

All the present fruit upon which he had to congratulate himself was, that the Brianite preacher denounced him in chapel next Sunday as a German Rationalist, who impiously pretended to explain away the Lord's visitation into a carnal matter of drains, and pipes, and gases, and such like; and that his rival of another denomination, who was a fanatic on the teetotal question, denounced him as bitterly for supporting the cause of drunkenness, by attributing cholera to want of cleanliness, while all rational people knew that its true source was intemperance. Poor Frank! he had preached against drunkenness many a time and oft: but because he would not add a Mohammedan eleventh commandment to those ten which men already find difficulty enough in keeping, he was set upon at once by a fanatic whose game it was—as it is that of too many—to snub sanitary reform, and hinder the spread of plain scientific truth, for the sake of pushing their own nostrum for all human ills.

In despair, Tom went off to Elsley Vavasour. Would he help? Would he join, as one of two householders, in making a representation to the proper authorities?

Elsley had never mixed in local matters: and if he had, he knew nothing of how to manage men, or to read an Act of Parliament; so, angry as Tom was inclined to be with him, he found it useless to quarrel with a man so utterly unpractical, who would, probably, had he been stirred into exertion, have done more harm than good.

"Only come with me, and satisfy yourself as to the existence of one of these nuisances, and then you will have grounds on which to go," said Tom, who had still hopes of making a cat's-paw of Elsley, and by his power over him, pulling the strings from behind.

Sorely against his will, Elsley went, saw, and smelt; came home again; was very unwell; and was visited nightly for a week after by that most disgusting of all phantoms, sanitary nightmare; which some who have worked in the foul places of the earth know but too well. Evidently his health could not stand it. There was no work to be got out of him in that direction.

"Would he write, then, and represent matters to Lord Scoutbush?"

How could he? He did not know the man; not a line had ever been exchanged between them. Their relations were so very peculiar. It would seem sheer impertinence on his part to interfere with the management of Lord Scoutbush's property

Really there was a great deal to be said, Tom felt, for poor Elsley's dislike of meddling in that quarter.

"Would Mrs. Vavasour write, then?"

"For Heaven's sake do not mention it to her. She would be so terrified about the children; she is worn out with anxiety already,"—and so forth.

Tom went back to Frank Headley.

"You see a good deal of Miss St. Just."

"I?—No—why?—what?" said poor Frank, blushing.

"Only that you must make her write to her brother about this cholera."

"My dear fellow, it is such a subject for a lady to meddle with."

"It has no scruple in meddling with ladies; so ladies ought to have none in meddling with it. You must do it as delicately as you will: but done it must be: it is our only chance. Tell her of Tardrew's obstinacy, or Scoutbush will go by his opinion; and tell her to keep the secret from her sister."

Frank did it, and well. Valencia was horror-struck, and wrote. Scoutbush was away at sea, nobody knew where; and a full fortnight elapsed before an answer came.

"My dear, you are quite mistaken if you think I can do anything. Nine-tenths of the houses in Aberalva are not in my hands; but copyholds and long leases, over which I have no power. If the people will complain to me of any given nuisance, I'll right it if I can; and if the doctor wants money, and sees any ways of laying it out well, he shall have what he wants, though I am very high in Queer Street just now, ma'am, having paid your bills before I left town, like a good brother: but I tell you again, I have no more power than you have, except over a few cottages, and Tardrew assured me, three weeks ago, that they were as comfortable as they ever had been."

So Tardrew had forestalled Thurnall in writing to the Viscount. Well, there was one more chance to be tried.

Tom gave his lecture in the school-room. He showed them magnified abominations enough to frighten all the children into fits, and dilated on horrors enough to spoil all appetites: he proved to them that, though they had the finest water in the world all over the town, they had contrived to poison almost every drop of it; he waxed eloquent, witty, sarcastic; and the net result was a general grumble.

"How did he get hold of all the specimens, as he calls them? What business has he poking his nose down people's wells and waterbutts?"

But an unexpected ally arose at this juncture, in the Coast-

guard Lieutenant, who, being valiant after his evening's brandy-and-water, rose and declared, "that Dr. Thurnall was a very clever man; that by what he'd seen himself in the West Indies, it was all as true as gospel; that the parish might have the cholera if it liked,"—and here a few expletives occurred,—"but that he'd see that the Coast-guard houses were put to rights at once; for he would not have the lives of Her Majesty's servants endangered by such dirty tricks, not fit for heathen savages," &c. &c.

Tom struck while the iron was hot. He saw that the great man's speech had produced an impression.

"Would he," (so he asked the Lieutenant privately,) "get some one to join him, and present a few of these nuisances?"

He would do anything in his contempt for "a lot of long-shore merchant-skippers and herringers, who went about calling themselves captains, and fancy themselves, Sir, as good as if they wore the Queen's uniform!"

"Well, then, can't we find another householder—some cantankerous dog who don't mind a row?"

Yes, the cantankerous dog was found, in the person of Mr. John Penruddock, coal-merchant, who had quarrelled with Tardrew, because Tardrew said he gave short weight—which he very probably did—and had quarrelled also with Thomas Beer, senior, ship-builder, about right of passage through a back-yard.

Mr. Penruddock suddenly discovered that Mr. Beer kept up a dirt-heap in the said back-yard, and with virtuous indignation vowed "he'd sarve the old beggar out at last."

So far so good. The weapons of reason and righteousness having failed, Tom felt at liberty to borrow the devil's tools. Now to pack a vestry, and to nominate a local committee.

The vestry was packed; the committee nominated: of course half of them refused to act—they "didn't want to go quarrelling with their neighbours."

Tom explained to them cunningly and delicately that they would have nothing to do; that one or two (he did not say that he was the one, and the two also) would do all the work, and bear all the odium; whereon the malcontents subsided, considering it likely that, after all, nothing would be done.

Some may fancy that matters were now getting somewhat settled. Those who do so know little of the charming machinery of local governments. One man has "summat to say,"—utterly irrelevant. Another must needs answer him with something equally irrelevant; a long chatter ensues, in spite of all cries to order and question. Soon one and another gets personal, and temper shows here and there. You would fancy that the go-ahead party try to restore order, and help business on. Not in the least. They have begun to cool a little. They are a little

afraid that they have committed themselves. If people quarrel with each other, perhaps they may quarrel with them too. And they begin to be wonderfully patient and impartial, in the hope of staving off the evil day, and finding some excuse for doing nothing after all. "Hear 'mun out!" . . . "Vair and zoft, let ev'ry man ha' his zay!" . . . "There's vary gude rason in it!" . . . "I didn't think of that avore;"—and so forth; till in a quarter of an hour the whole question has to be discussed over again, through the fog of a dozen fresh fallacies, and the miserable earnest man finds himself considerably worse off than when he began. Happy for him if some chance word is not let drop, which will afford the whole assembly an excuse for falling on him open-mouthed, as the cause of all their woes!

That chance word came. Mr. Penruddock gave a spiteful hit, being, as he said, of a cantankerous turn, to Mr. Treluddra, principal "jowder," *i.e.* fish salesman, of Aberalva. Whereon Treluddra, whose conscience told him that there was at present in his back-yard a cartload and more of fish in every stage of putrefaction, which he had kept rotting there rather than lower the market-price, rose in wrath.

"An' if any committee puts its noz into my back-yard, if it doant get the biggest cod's innards as I can collar hold on, about its ears, my name is not Treluddra! A man's house is his castle, says I, and them as takes up with any o' this open-day burglary, for it's nothing less, has to do wi' me, that's all, and them as knows their interest, knows me!"

Terrible were these words; for old Treluddra, like most jowders, combined the profession of money-lender with that of salesman; and there were dozens in the place who were in debt to him for money advanced to buy boats and nets, after wreck and loss. Besides, to offend one jowder was to offend all. They combined to buy the fish at any price they chose: if angered, they would combine now and then not to buy it at all.

"You old twenty per cent. rascal," roared the Lieutenant, "after making a fortune out of these poor fellows' mishaps, do you want to poison 'em all with your stinking fish?"

"I say, Lieutenant," says old Beer, whose son owed Treluddra fifty pounds at that moment, "fair's fair. You mind your Coast-guard, and we'm mind our trade. We'm free fishermen, by charter and right; you'm not our master, and you shall know it."

"Know it?" says the Lieutenant, foaming.

"Iss; you put your head inside my presences, and I'll split mun open, if I be hanged for it."

"You split my head open?"

"Iss, by ——." And the old grey-bearded sea-king set his arms akimbo.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen, for Heaven's sake!" cries poor Headley, "this is really going too far. Gentlemen, the vestry is adjourned!"

"Best thing too! oughtn't never to have been called," says one and another.

And some one, as he went out, muttered something about "interloping strange doctors, colloquies with popish curates," which was answered by a—"Put 'mun in the quay pule," from Treluddra.

Tom stepped up to Treluddra instantly. "What were you so kind as to say, Sir?"

"Treluddra turned very pale. "I didn't say nought."

"Oh, but I assure you I heard; and I shall be most happy to jump into the quay pule this afternoon, if it will afford you the slightest amusement. Say the word, and I'll borrow a flute, and play you the Rogue's March all the while with my right hand, swimming with my left. Now, gentlemen, one word before we part!"

"Who be you?" cries some one.

"A man at least, and ought to have a fair hearing. Now, I ask you, what possible interest can I have in this matter? I knew when I began that I should give myself a frightful quantity of trouble, and get only what I have got."

"Why did you begin at all, then?"

"Because I was a very foolish, meddlesome ass, who fancied that I ought to do my duty once in a way by my neighbours. Now, I have only to say, that if you will but forgive and forget, and let bygones be bygones, I promise you solemnly I'll never do my duty by you again as long as I live, nor interfere with the sacred privilege of every free-born Englishman, to do that which is right in the sight of his own eyes, and wrong too!"

"You'm making fun at us," said old Beer dubiously.

"Well, Mr. Beer, and isn't that better than quarrelling with you? Come along, we'll all go home and forget it, like good Christians. Perhaps the cholera won't come; and if it does, what's the odds so long as you're happy, eh?"

And to the intense astonishment both of the Lieutenant and Frank, Tom walked home with the malcontents, making himself so agreeable, that he was forgiven freely on the spot.

"What does the fellow mean? He's deserted us, Sir, after bringing us here to make fools of us!"

Frank could give no answer; but Thurnall gave one himself that evening, both to Frank and the Lieutenant.

"The cholera will come; and these fellows are just mad; but I mustn't quarrel with them, mad or not."

"Why, then?"

"For the same reason that you must not. If we keep our influence, we may be able to do some good at the last, which means, in plain English, saving a few human lives. As for you, Lieutenant, you have behaved like a hero, and have been served as heroes generally are. What you must do is this. On the first hint of disease, pack up your traps and your good lady, and go and live in the watch-house across the river. As for the men's houses, I'll set them to rights in a day, if you'll get the commander of the district to allow you a little chloride of lime and whitewash."

And so the matter ended.

"You are a greater puzzle than ever to me, Thurnall," said Frank. "You are always pretending to care for nothing but your own interest, and yet here you have gone out of your way to incur odium, knowing, you say, that your cause was all but hopeless."

"Well, I do it because I like it. It's a sort of sporting with your true doctor. He blazes away at a disease where he sees one, as he would at a bear or a lion; the very sight of it excites his organ of destructiveness. Don't you understand me? You hate sin, you know. Well, I hate disease. Moral evil is your devil, and physical evil is mine. I hate it, little or big; I hate to see a fellow sick; I hate to see a child rickety and pale; I hate to see a speck of dirt in the street; I hate to see a woman's gown torn; I hate to see her stockings down at heel; I hate to see anything wasted, anything awry, anything going wrong; I hate to see water-power wasted, manure wasted, land wasted, muscle wasted, pluck wasted, brains wasted; I hate neglect, incapacity, idleness, ignorance, and all the disease and misery which spring out of that. There's my devil; and I can't help it, for the life of me, going right at his throat, wheresoever I meet him!"

Lastly, rather to clear his reputation than in the hope of doing good, Tom wrote up to London, and detailed the case to that much-calumniated body, the General Board of Health, informing them civilly, that the Nuisances Removal Act was simply waste paper; that he could not get it to bear at all on Aberalva; and that if he had done so, it would have been equally useless, for the simple reason that it constituted the offenders themselves judge and jury in their own case.

To which the Board returned for answer, that they were perfectly aware of the fact, and deeply deplored the same: but that as soon as cholera broke out in Aberalva, they should be most happy to send down an inspector.

To which Tom replied courteously, that he would not give them the trouble, being able, he trusted, to perform without

assistance the not uncommon feat of shutting the stable-door after the horse was stolen.

And so was Aberalva left "a virgin city," undefiled by Government interference, to the blessings of that "local government," which signifies, in plain English, the leaving the few to destroy themselves and the many, by the unchecked exercise of the virtues of pride and ignorance, stupidity and stinginess.

But to Tom, in his sorest need, arose a new and most unexpected coadjutor; and this was the way in which it came to pass.

For it befell in that pleasant summer time, "when small birds sing, and shaughs are green," that Thurnall started, one bright Sunday eve, to see a sick child at an upland farm, some few miles from the town. And partly because he liked the walk, and partly because he could no other, having neither horse nor gig, he went on foot; and whistled as he went like any throstle-cock, along the pleasant vale, by flowery banks and ferny walls, by oak and ash and thorn, while Alva flashed and swirled, between green boughs below, clear coffee-brown from last night's rain. Some miles up the turnpike road he went, and then away to the right, through the ash-woods of Trebooze, up by the rill which drips from pool to pool over the ledges of grey slate, deep-bedded in dark sedge, and broad bright burdock leaves, and tall angelica, and ell-broad rings and tufts of king, and crown, and lady-fern, and all the semi-tropic luxuriance of the fat western soil, and steaming western woods; out into the boggy moor at the glen head, all fragrant with the gold-tipped gale, where the turf is enamelled with the hectic marsh violet, and the pink pimpernel, and the pale yellow leaf-stars of the butterwort, and the blue bells and green threads of the ivy-leaved campanula; out upon the steep smooth down above, and away over the broad cattle-pastures; and then to pause a moment, and look far and wide over land and sea.

It was a "day of God." The earth lay like one great emerald, ringed and roofed with sapphire; blue sea, blue mountain, blue sky overhead. There she lay, not sleeping, but basking in her quiet Sabbath joy, as though her two great sisters of the sea and air had washed her weary limbs with holy tears, and purged away the stains of last week's sin and toil, and cooled her hot worn forehead with their pure incense-breath, and folded her within their azure robes, and brooded over her with smiles of pitying love, till she smiled back in answer, and took heart and hope for next week's weary work.

Heart and hope for next week's work.—That was the sermon which it preached to Tom Thurnall, as he stood there alone, a stranger and a wanderer, like Ulysses of old; but, like him,

self-helpful, cheerful, fate-defiant. In one respect, indeed, he knew less than Ulysses, and was more of a heathen than he; for he knew not what Ulysses knew, that a heavenly guide was with him in his wanderings; still less what Ulysses knew not, that what he called the malicious sport of fortune was, in truth, the earnest education of a Father: but who will blame him for getting strength and comfort from such merely natural founts, or say that the impulse came from below, and not from above, which made him say—

"Brave old world she is, after all, and right-well made; and looks right well to-day, in her go-to-meeting clothes; and plenty of room and chance in her for a brave man to earn his bread, if he will but go right on about his business, as the birds and the flowers do, instead of peaking and pining over what people think of him, like that miserable Briggs. Hark to that jolly old missel-thrush below! he's had his nest to build, and his supper to earn, and his young ones to feed, and all the crows and kites in the wood to drive away, the sturdy John Bull that he is; and yet he can find time to sing as merrily as an abbot, morning and evening, since he sang the new year in last January. And why should not I?"

Let him be a while; there are sounds of deeper meaning in the air, if his heart had ears to hear them; far off church-bells chiming to even-song; hymn-tunes floating up the glen from the little chapel in the vale. He may learn what they, too, mean some day. Honour to him at least, that he has learnt what the missel-thrush below can tell him. If he accept cheerfully and manfully the things which he does see, he will be all the more able to enter hereafter into the deeper mystery of things unseen. The road toward true faith and reverence for God's kingdom of heaven does not lie through Manichæan contempt and slander of God's kingdom of earth.

So let him stride over the down, enjoying the mere fact of life, and health, and strength, and whistling shrilly to the bird below, who trumpets out a few grand ringing notes, and repeats them again and again, in saucy self-satisfaction; and then stops to listen for the answer to this challenge; and then rattles on again with a fresh passage, more saucily than ever, in a tone which seems to ask,—"You could sing that, eh? but can you sing this, my fine fellow on the down above?" So he seems to Tom to say; and, tickled with the fancy, Tom laughs, and whistles, and laughs, and has just time to compose his features as he steps up to the farm-yard gate.

Let him be, I say again. He might have better Sunday thoughts; perhaps he will have some day. At least he is a man, and a brave one; and as the greater contains the less,

surely before a man can be a good man, he must be a brave one first, much more a man at all. Cowards, old Odin held, inevitably went to the very bottom of Hela-pool, and by no possibility, unless of course they became brave at last, could rise out of that everlasting bog, but sank whining lower and lower, like mired cattle, to all eternity in the unfathomable peat-slime. And if the twenty-first chapter of the Book of Revelation, and the eighth verse, is to be taken as it stands, their doom has not altered since Odin's time, unless to become still worse.

Tom came up, over the home-close and through the barton-gate, through the farm-yard, and stopped at last at the porch. The front door was open, and the door beyond it; and ere he knocked, he stopped, looking in silence at a picture which held him spell-bound for a moment by its rich and yet quiet beauty.

Tom was no artist, and knew no more of painting, in spite of his old friendship with Claude, than was to be expected of a keen and observant naturalist who had seen half the globe. Indeed, he had been in the habit of snubbing Claude's profession; and of arriving, on pre-Raphaelite grounds, at a by no means pre-Raphaelite conclusion. "A picture, you say, is worth nothing unless you copy Nature. But you can't copy her. She is ten times more gorgeous than any man can dare represent her. Ergo, every picture is a failure; and the nearest hedge-bush is worth all your galleries together"—a syllogism of sharp edge, which he would back up by Byron's—

> "I've seen much finer women, ripe and real,
> Than all the nonsense of their stone ideal."

But here was one of Nature's own pictures, drawn and coloured by more than mortal hand, and framed over and above, ready to his eye, by the square of the dark doorway, beyond which all was flooded with the full glory of the low north-western sun.

A dark oak-ribbed ceiling; walls of pale fawn-yellow; an open window, showing a corner of rich olive-stone wall, enamelled with golden lichens, orange and green combs of polypody, pink and grey tufts of pellitory, all glowing in the sunlight.

Above the window-sill rose a bush of maiden-blush roses; a tall spire of blue monkshood; and one head of scarlet lychnis, like a spark of fire; and, behind all, the dark blue sea, which faded into the pale-blue sky.

At the window stood a sofa of old maroon leather, its dark hue throwing out in strong relief two figures who sat upon it. And when Tom had once looked at them, he looked at nothing else.

There sat the sick girl, her head nestling upon the shoulder of Grace Harvey; a tall, delicate thing of seventeen, with thin white cheeks, the hectic spot aflame on each, and long fair curls, which mingled lovingly with Grace's dark tresses, as they sat cheek against cheek, and hand in hand. Her eyes were closed; Tom thought at first that she was asleep: but there was a quiet smile about her pale lips; and every now and then her left hand left Grace's, to move toward a leaf full of strawberries which lay on Grace's lap; and Tom could see that she was listening intently to Grace, who told and told, in that sweet, measured voice of hers, her head erect, her face in the full blaze of sunshine, her great eyes looking out far away beyond the sea, beyond the sky, into some infinite which only she beheld.

Tom had approached unheard, across the farm-yard straw. He stood and looked his fill. The attitude of the two girls was so graceful, that he was loth to disturb it; and loth, too, to disturb a certain sunny calm which warmed at once and softened his stout heart.

He wished, too—he scarce knew why—to hear what Grace was saying; and as he listened, her voice was so distinct and delicate in its modulations, that every word came clearly to his ear.

It was the beautiful old legend of St. Dorothea:—

"So they did all sorts of dreadful things to her, and then led her away to die; and they stood laughing there. But after a little time there came a boy, the prettiest boy that ever was seen on earth, and in his hand a basket full of fruits and flowers, more beautiful than tongue can tell. And he said, 'Dorothea sends you these, out of the heavenly garden which she told you of—will you believe her now?' And then, before they could reply, he vanished away. And Theophilus looked at the flowers, and tasted the fruit—and a new heart grew up within him; and he said, 'Dorothea's God shall be my God, and I will die for Him like her.'

"So you see, darling, there are sweeter fruits than these, and gayer flowers, in the place to which you go; and all the lovely things in this world here will seem quite poor and worthless beside the glory of that better land which He will show you: and yet you will not care to look at them; for the sight of Him will be enough, and you will care to think of nothing else."

"And you are sure He will accept me, after all?" asked the sick girl, opening her eyes, and looking up at Grace. She saw Thurnall standing in the doorway, and gave a little scream.

Tom came forward, bowing. "I am very sorry to have disturbed you. I suspect Miss Harvey was giving you better medicine than I can give."

Now why did Tom say that, to whom the legend of St. Dorothea, and, indeed, that whole belief in a better land, was as a dream fit only for girls?

Not altogether because he must need say something civil. True, he felt, on the whole, about the future state as Goethe did —"To the able man this world is not dumb: why should he ramble off into eternity? Such incomprehensible subjects lie too far off, and only disturb our thoughts, if made the subject of daily meditation." That there was a future state he had no doubt. Our having been born once, he used to say, is the strongest possible presumption in favour of our being born again; and probably, as nature always works upward and develops higher forms, in some higher state. Indeed, for aught he knew, the old ichthyosaurs and plesiosaurs might be alive now, as lions—or as men. He himself, indeed, he had said, ere now, had been probably a pterodactyle of the Lias, neither fish, flesh, nor good red herring, but crocodile and bat in one, able alike to swim, or run, or fly, eat anything, and live in any element. Still it was no concern of his. He was here; and here was his business. He had not thought of this life before he came into it; and it would be time enough to think of the next life when he got into it. Besides, he had all a doctor's dislike of those terrors of the unseen world, with which some men are wont to oppress still more failing nature, and break the bruised reed. His business was to cure his patients' bodies; and if he could not do that, at least to see that life was not shortened in them by nervous depression and anxiety. Accustomed to see men of every character die under every possible circumstance, he had come to the conclusion that the "safety of a man's soul" could by no possibility be inferred from his death-bed temper. The vast majority, good or bad, died in peace: why not let them die so? If nature kindly took off the edge of sorrow, by blunting the nervous system, what right had man to interfere with so merciful an arrangement? Every man, he held in his easy optimism, would go where he ought to go: and it could be no possible good to him—indeed, it might be a very bad thing for him, as in this life—to go where he ought not to go. So he used to argue, with three-fourths of mankind, mingling truth and falsehood: and would, on these grounds, have done his best to turn the dissenting preacher out of that house, had he found him in it. But to-day he was in a more lenient, perhaps in a more human, and therefore more spiritual mood. It was all very well for him, full of life, and power, and hope, to look on death in that cold, careless way; but for that poor young thing, cut off just as life opened from all that made life lovely—was not death for her a painful, ugly anomaly? Could she be

blamed, if she shuddered at going forth into the unknown blank, she knew not whither? All very well for the old emperor of Rome, who had lived his life and done his work, to play with the dreary question—

> "Animula, vagula, blandula,
> Hospes comesque corporis,
> Quæ nunc abibis in loca,
> Rigidula, nudula, pallida?—"

But she, who had lived no life, and done no work—only had pined through weary years of hideous suffering; crippled and ulcerated with scrofula, now dying of consumption: was it not a merciful dream, a beautiful dream, a just dream—so beautiful and just, that perhaps it might be true,—that in some fairer world, all this, and more, might be made up to her? If not, was it not a mistake and an injustice, that she should ever have come into the world at all? And was not Grace doing a rational as well as a loving work, in telling her, under whatsoever symbols, that such a home of rest and beauty awaited her? It was not the sort of place to which he expected, perhaps even wished, to go: but it fitted well enough with a young girl's hopes, a young girl's powers of enjoyment. Let it be; perhaps there was such a place,—why not?—fitted for St. Dorothea, and those cut off in youth like her; and other places fit for such as he. And he spoke more tenderly than usual (though he was never untender), as he said,—

"And you feel better to-day? I am sure you must, with such a kind friend, to tell you such sweet tales."

"I do not feel better, thank you. And why should I wish to do so? You all take too much trouble about me; why do you want to keep me here?"

"We are loth to lose you; and besides, while you can be kept here, it is a sign that you ought to be here."

"So Grace tells me. Yes, I will be patient, and wait till He has done His work. I am more patient now; am I not, Grace?" And she fondled Grace's hand, and looked up in her face.

"Yes," said Grace, who was standing near, with downcast face, trying to avoid Tom's eye. "Yes, you are very good; but you must not talk:" but the girl went on, with kindling eye,—

"Ah—I was very fretful at first, because I could not go to heaven at once: but Grace showed me how it was good to be here, as well as there, as long as He thought that I might be made perfect by sufferings. And since then, my pain has become quite pleasant to me, and I am ready to wait and bear—wait and bear."

"You must not talk—see, you are beginning to cough," said

Tom, who wished somehow to stop a form of thought which so utterly puzzled him. Not that he had not heard it before, common-place enough indeed it is, thank God: but that day the words came home to him with spirit and power, all the more solemnly from their contrast with the scene around—without, all sunshine, joy, and glory: all which could tempt a human being to linger here: and within, that young girl longing to leave it all, and yet content to stay and suffer. What mysteries there were in the human spirit—mysteries to which that knowledge of mankind on which he prided himself gave him no key!

"What if I were laid on my back to-morrow for life, by a fall, a blow, as I have seen many a better man than me;—should I not wish to have one to talk to me, as she was talking to that child?" And for a moment a yearning after Grace came over him, as it had done before, and swept from his mind the dark cloud of suspicion.

"Now I must talk with your mother," said he; "for you have better company than mine; and I hear her just coming in."

He settled little matters for his patient's comfort with the farmer's wife. When he returned to bid her good-bye Grace was gone.

"I hope I have not driven her away."

"Oh no; she had been here an hour, and she must go back now, to get her mother's supper."

"That is a good girl," said Tom, looking after her as she went down the field.

"She's an angel from heaven, Sir. Not a three days go over without her walking up here all this way after her work, to comfort my poor maid—and all of us as well. It's like the dew of heaven upon us. Pity, Sir, you didn't see her home."

"I should have liked it well enough: but folks might talk, if two young people were seen walking together Sunday evening."

"Oh, Sir, they know her too well by now, for miles round: and you too, Sir, I'll make bold to say."

"Well, at least I'll go after her."

So Tom went, and kept Grace in sight, till she had crossed the little moor, and disappeared in the wood below.

He had gone about an hundred yards into the wood, when he heard voices and laughter—then a loud shriek. He hurried forward. In another minute, Grace rushed up to him, her eyes wide with terror and indignation.

"What is it?" cried he, trying to stop her: but, not seeming to see him, she dashed past him, and ran on. Another moment, and a man appeared in full pursuit.

It was Trebooze of Trebooze, an evil laugh upon his face.

Tom planted himself across the narrow path in an attitude which there was no mistaking.

Not a word passed between them. Silently and instinctively, like two fierce dogs, the two men flew upon each other; Tom full of righteous wrath, and Trebooze of half-drunken passion, turned to fury by the interruption.

He was a far taller and heavier man than Thurnall, and, as the bully of the neighbourhood, counted on an easy victory. But he was mistaken. After the first rush was over, he found it impossible to close with his foe, and saw in the doctor's face, now grown cool and business-like as usual, the wily smile of superior science and expected triumph.

"Brandy-and-water in the morning ought not to improve the wind," said Tom to himself, as his left hand countered provokingly, while his right rattled again and again upon Trebooze's watch-chain. "Justice will overtake you in the offending part, which I take to be the epigastric region."

In a few minutes more the scuffle ended shamefully enough for the sottish squireen.

Tom stood over him for a minute, as he sat grovelling and groaning among the long grass. "I may as well see that I have not killed him. No, he will do as well as ever—which is not saying much. . . . . Now, Sir! Go home quietly, and ask Mrs. Trebooze for a little rhubarb and salvolatile. I'll call up in the course of to-morrow to see how you are."

"I'll kill you, if I catch you!"

"As a man, I am open of course to be killed by any fair means: but as a doctor, I am still bound to see after my patient's health." And Tom bowed civilly, and walked back up the path to find Grace, after washing face and hands in the brook.

He found her up at Tolchard's farm, trembling and thankful.

"I cannot do less than see Miss Harvey safe home."

Grace hesitated.

"Mrs. Tolchard, I am sure, will walk with us; it would be safer, in case you felt faint again."

But Mrs. Tolchard would not come to save Grace's notions of propriety; so Tom passed Grace's arm through his own. She offered to withdraw it.

"No; you will require it. You do not know yet how much you have gone through. My fear is, that you will feel it all the more painfully when the excitement is past. I shall send you up a cordial; and you must promise me to take it. You owe me a little debt you know, to-day; you must pay it by taking my medicines."

Grace looked up at him sidelong; for there was a playful

tenderness in his voice which was new to her, and which thrilled her through and through.

"I will indeed, I promise you. But I am so much better now. Really, I can walk alone!" And she withdrew her arm from his, but not hastily.

After that they walked on awhile in silence. Grace kept her veil down, for her eyes were full of tears. She loved that man intensely, utterly. She did not seek to deny it to herself. God had given him to her, and hers he was. The very sea, the devourer whom she hated, who hungered to swallow up all young fair life, the very sea had yielded him up to her, alive from the dead. And yet that man, she knew, suspected her of a base and hateful crime. It was too dreadful! She could not exculpate herself, save by blank denial—and what would that avail? The large hot drops ran down her cheeks. She had need of all her strength to prevent sobbing.

She looked round. In the bright summer evening, all things were full of joy and love. The hedge-banks were gay as flower gardens; the swifts chased each other, screaming harsh delight; the ring-dove murmured in the wood beneath his world-old song, which she had taught the children a hundred times—

> "Curuckity coo, curuck coo;
> You love me, and I love you!"

The woods slept golden in the evening sunlight; and over head brooded, like one great smile of God, the everlasting blue.

"He will right me!" she said. "'Hold thee still in the Lord, and abide patiently, and He will make thy righteousness clear as the light, and thy just dealing as the noon-day!'" And after that thought she wept no more.

Was it as a reward for her faith that Tom began to talk to her? He had paced on by her side, serious, but not sad. True, he had suspected her; he suspected her still. But that scene with the dying child had been no sham. There, at least, there was nothing to suspect, nothing to sneer at. The calm purity, self-sacrifice, hope, which was contained in it, had softened his world-hardened spirit, and woke up in him feelings which were always pleasant, feelings which the sight of his father, or the writing to his father, could only awaken. Quaintly enough, the thought of Grace and of his father seemed intertwined, inextricable. If the old man had but such a nurse as she! And for a moment he felt a glow of tenderness toward her, because he thought she would be tender to his father. She had stolen his money, certainly; or if not, she knew where it was, and would not tell him. Well, what matter just then? He did not want the money at that minute. How much pleasanter and wiser to

take things as they came, and enjoy himself while he could; and fancy that she was always what he had seen her that day. After all, it was much more pleasant to trust people than to suspect them: "Handsome is who handsome does! And besides, she did me the kindness of saving my life; so it would but be civil to talk to her a little."

He began to talk to her about the lovely scene around; and found, to his surprise, that she saw as much of it as he, and saw a great deal more in it than he. Her answers were short, modest, faltering; but each one of them suggestive; and Tom soon found that he had met with a mind which contained all the elements of poetry, and needed only education to develop them.

"What a blue stocking, pre-Raphaelite seventh-heavenarian she would have been, if she had had the misfortune to be born in that station of life!" But where a clever man is talking to a beautiful woman, talk he will, and must, for the mere sake of showing off, though she be but a village schoolmistress; and Tom soon found himself, with a secret sneer at his own vanity, displaying before her all the much finer things that he had seen in his travels; and as he talked, she answered, with quiet expressions of wonder, sympathy, regret at her own narrow sphere of experience, till, as if the truth was not enough, he found himself running to the very edge of exaggeration, and a little over it, in the enjoyment of calling out her passion for the marvellous, especially when called out in honour of himself.

And she, simple creature, drank it all in as sparkling wine, and only dreaded lest the stream should cease. Adventures with noble savages in palm-fringed coral-islands, with greedy robbers amid the fragrant hills of Greece, with fierce Indians beneath the snow-peaks of the Far West, with coward Mexicans among tunals of cactus and agave, beneath the burning tropic sun—What a man he was! Where had he not been? and what had he not seen? And how he had been preserved—for her? And his image seemed to her utterly beautiful and glorious, clothed as it was in the beauty and glory of all that he had seen, and done, and suffered. Oh Love, Love, Love, the same in peasant and in peer! The more honour to you, then, old Love, to be the same thing in this world which *is* common to peasant and to peer. They say that you are blind; a dreamer, an exaggerator—a liar, in short. They know just nothing about you, then. You will not see people as they seem, and as they have become, no doubt: but why? because you see them as they ought to be, and are, in some deep way, eternally, in the sight of Him who conceived and created them.

At last she started, as if waking from a pleasant dream, and spoke, half to herself—

"Oh, how foolish of me—to be idling away this opportunity: the only one, perhaps, which I may have! Oh, Mr. Thurnall, tell me about this cholera!"

"What about it?"

"Everything. Ever since I heard of what you have been saying to the people, ever since Mr. Headley's sermon, it has been like fire in my ears!"

"I am truly glad to hear it. If all parsons had preached about it for the last fifteen years as Mr. Headley did last Sunday, if they had told people plainly that, if the cholera was God's judgment at all, it was His judgment of the sin of dirt, and that the repentance which He required was to wash and be clean in literal earnest, the cholera would be impossible in England by now."

"Oh, Mr. Thurnall: but is it not God's doing? and can we stop His hand?"

"I know nothing about that, Miss Harvey. I only know that wheresoever cholera breaks out, it is some one's fault: and if deaths occur, some one ought to be tried for manslaughter—I had almost said murder, and transported for life."

"Some one? Who?"

"That will be settled in the next generation, when men have common sense enough to make laws for the preservation of their own lives, against the dirt, and covetousness, and idleness, of a set of human hogs."

Grace was silent for awhile.

"But can nothing be done to keep it off now? Must it come?"

"I believe it must. Still one may do enough to save many lives in the meanwhile."

"Enough to save many lives—lives?—immortal souls, too! Oh, what could I do?"

"A great deal, Miss Harvey," said Tom, across whom the recollection of Grace's influence flashed for the first time. What a help she might be to him!

And he talked on and on to her, and found that she entered into his plans with all her wild enthusiasm, but also with sound practical common sense; and Tom began to respect her intellect as well as her heart.

At last, however, she faltered—

"Oh, if I could but believe all this! Is it not fighting against God?"

"I do not know what sort of God yours is, Miss Harvey. I believe in some One who made all that!" and he pointed round him to the glorious woods and glorious sky; "I should have fancied from your speech to that poor girl, that you believed in Him also. You may, however, only believe in the same being

in whom the Methodist parson believes, one who intends to hurl into endless agony every human being who has not had a chance of hearing the said preacher's nostrum for delivering men out of the hands of Him who made them!"

"What do you mean?" asked Grace, startled alike by Tom's words, and the intense scorn and bitterness of his tone.

"That matters little. What do you mean in turn? What did you mean by saying, that saving lives is saving immortal souls?"

"Oh, is it not giving them time to repent? What will become of them, if they are cut off in the midst of their sins?"

"If you had a son whom it was not convenient to you to keep at home, would his being a bad fellow—the greatest scoundrel on the earth—be a reason for your turning him into the streets to live by thieving, and end by going to the dogs for ever and a day?"

"No; but what do you mean?"

"That I do not think that God, when He sends a human being out of this world, is more cruel than you or I would be. If we transport a man because he is too bad to be in England, and he shows any signs of mending, we give him a fresh chance in the colonies, and let him start again, to try if he cannot do better next time. And do you fancy that God, when He transports a man out of this world, never gives him a fresh chance in another—especially when nine out of ten poor rascals have never had a fair chance yet?"

Grace looked up in his face astonished.

"Oh, if I could but believe that! Oh! it would give me some gleam of hope for my two!—— But no—it's not in Scripture. Where the tree falls there it lies."

"And as the fool dies, so dies the wise man; and there is one account to the righteous and to the wicked. And a man has no pre-eminence over a beast, for both turn alike to dust; and Solomon does not know, he says, or any one else, anything about the whole matter, or even whether there be any life after death at all; and so, he says, the only wise thing is to leave such deep questions alone, for Him who made us to settle in His own way, and just to fear God and keep His commandments, and do the work which lies nearest us with all our might."

Grace was silent.

"You are surprised to hear me quote Scripture, and well you may be: but that same books of Ecclesiastes is a very old favourite with me; for I am no Christian, but a worlding, if ever there was one. But it does puzzle me why you, who are a Christian, should talk one half-hour as you have been talking to that poor girl, and the next go for information about the next life to poor old disappointed, broken-hearted Solomon, with his three

hundred and odd idolatrous wives, who confesses fairly that this life is a failure, and that he does not know whether there is any next life at all."

"Whether Tom were altogether right or not, is not the question here; the novelist's business is to represent the real thoughts of mankind, when they are not absolutely unfit to be told; and certainly Tom spoke the doubts of thousands when he spoke his own.

Grace was silent still.

"Well," he said, "beyond that I can't go, being no theologian. But when a preacher tells people in one breath of a God who so loves men that He gave His own Son to save them, and in the next, that the same God so hates men that He will cast nine-tenths of them into hopeless torture for ever,—(and if that is not hating, I don't know what is),—unless he, the preacher, gets a chance of talking to them for a few minutes—Why, I should like Miss Harvey, to put that gentleman upon a real fire for ten minutes, instead of his comfortable Sunday's dinner, which stands ready frying for him, and which he was going home to eat, as jolly as if all the world was not going to destruction; and there let him feel what fire was like, and reconsider his statements."

Grace looked up at him no more: but walked on in silence, pondering many things.

"Howsoever that may be, Sir, tell me what to do in this cholera, and I will do it, if I kill myself with work or infection!"

"You shan't do that. We cannot spare you from Aberalva, Grace," said Tom; "you must save a few more poor creatures ere you die, out of the hands of that Good Being who made little children, and love, and happiness, and the flowers, and the sunshine, and the fruitful earth; and who, you say, redeemed them all again, when they were lost, by an act of love which passes all human dreams."

"Do not talk so!" cried Grace. "It frightens me; it puzzles me, and makes me miserable. Oh, if you would but become a Christian!"

"And listen to the Gospel?"

"Yes—oh yes!"

"A gospel means good news, I thought. When you have any to tell me, I will listen. Meanwhile, the news that three out of four of those poor fellows down town are going to a certain place, seems to me such terribly bad news, that I can't help fancying that it is not the Gospel at all; and so get on the best way I can, listening to the good news about God which this grand old world, and my microscope, and my books, tell me. No, Grace, I have more good news than that, and I'll confess it to you."

He paused, and his voice softened.

"Say what the preacher may, He must be a good God who makes such creatures as you, and sends them into the world to comfort poor wretches. Follow your own sweet heart, Grace, and torment yourself no more with these dark dreams!"

"My heart?" cried she, looking down; "it is deceitful and desperately wicked."

"I wish mine were too, then," said Tom: "but it cannot be, as long as it is so unlike yours. Now stop, Grace, I want to speak to you."

There was a gate in front of them, leading into the road.

As they came to it, Tom lingered with his hand upon the top bar, that Grace might stop. She did stop, half frightened. Why did he call her Grace?

"I wish to speak to you on one matter, on which I believe I ought to have spoken long ago."

She looked up at him, surprise in her large eyes; and turned pale as he went on.

"I ought long ago to have begged your pardon for something rude which I said to you at your own door. This day has made me quite ashamed of—"

But she interrupted him, quite wildly, gasping for breath.

"The belt? The belt? Oh, my God! my God! Have you heard anything more?—anything more?"

"Not a word; but—"

To his astonishment, she heaved a deep sigh, as if relieved from a sudden fear. His face clouded, and his eyebrows rose. Was she guilty, then, after all?"

With the quick eyes of love, she saw the change; and broke out passionately,—

"Yes; suspect me! suspect me, if you will! only give me time! Send me to prison, innocent as I am—innocent as that child there above—would God I were dying like her!—Only give me time! O misery! I had hoped you had forgotten—that it was lost in the sea—that—what am I saying?—Only give me time!"—and she dropped on her knees before him, wringing her hands.

"Miss Harvey! This is not worthy of you. If you be innocent, as I don't doubt, what more do you need—or I?"

He took her hands, and lifted her up: but she still kept looking down, round, upwards, like a hunted deer, and pleading in words which seemed sobbed out—as by some poor soul on the rack—between choking spasms of agony.

"Oh, I don't know,—God help me! O Lord, help me! I will try and find it—I know I shall find it! only have patience;

have patience with me a little, and I know I shall bring it you; and then—and then you will forgive?—forgive?"

And she laid her hands upon his arms, and looked up in his face with a piteous smile of entreaty.

She had never looked so beautiful as at that moment. The devil saw it; and entered into the heart of Thomas Thurnall. He caught her in his arms, kissed away her tears, stopped her mouth with kisses. "Yes! I'll wait—wait for ever, if you will! I'll lose another belt, for such another look as that!"

She was bewildered for a moment, poor fond wretch, at finding herself where she would gladly have stayed for ever: but quickly she recovered her reason.

"Let me go!" she cried, struggling. "This is not right! Let me go, Sir!" and she tried to cover her burning cheeks with her hands.

"I will not, Grace! I love you! I love you, I tell you!"

"You do not, Sir!" and she struggled still more fiercely. "Do not deceive yourself! Me you cannot deceive! Let me go, I say! You could not demean yourself to love a poor girl like me!"

Utterly losing his head, Tom ran on with passionate words.

"No, Sir! you know that I am not fit to be your wife: and do you fancy that I—"

Maddened now, Tom went on, ere he was aware, from a foolish deed to a base speech.

"I know nothing, but that I shall keep you in pawn for my belt. Till that is at least restored, you are in my power, Grace! Remember that!"

She thrust him away with so sudden and desperate a spasm, that he was forced to let her go. She stood gazing at him, a trembling deer no longer, but rather a lioness at bay, her face flashing beautiful indignation.

"In your power! Yes, Sir! My character, my life, for aught I know: but not my soul. Send me to Bodmin Gaol if you will; but offer no more insults to a modest maiden! Oh!"—and her expression changed to one of lofty sorrow and pity;—"Oh! to find all men alike at heart! After having fancied you—fancied you," (what she had fancied him her woman's modesty dare not repeat)—"to find you even such another as Mr. Trebooze!"

Tom was checked. As for mere indignation, in such cases, he had seen enough of that to trust it no more than "ice that is one night old:" but pity for him was a weapon of defence to which he was unaccustomed. And there was no contempt in her pity; and no affectation either. Her voice was solemn, but tender, gently upbraiding, like her countenance. Never had he

felt Grace's mysterious attraction so strong upon him; and for the first and last time, perhaps, for many a year, he answered with downcast eyes of shame.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Harvey. I have been rude—mad. If you will look in your glass when you go home, and have a woman's heart in you, you may at least see an excuse for me: but like Mr. Trebooze I am not. Forgive and forget, and let us walk home rationally." And he offered to take her hand.

"No: not now! Not till I can trust you, Sir!" said she. The words were lofty enough: but there was a profound melancholy in their tone which humbled Tom still more. Was it possible—she seemed to have hinted it—that she had thought him a very grand personage till now, and that he had disgraced himself in her eyes?

If a man had suspected Tom of such a feeling, I fear he would have cared little, save how to restore the balance by making a fool of the man who fancied him a fool: but no male self-sufficiency or pride is proof against the contempt of woman; and Tom slunk along by the schoolmistress's side, as if he had been one of her naughtiest school-children. He tried, of course, to brazen it out to his own conscience. He had done no harm, after all; indeed, never seriously meant any. She was making a ridiculous fuss about nothing. It was all part and parcel of her methodistical cant. He dared say that she was not as prudish with the methodist parson. And at that base thought he paused; for a flush of rage, and a strong desire on such hypothesis to slay the said methodist parson, or any one else who dared even to look sweet on Grace, showed him plainly enough what he had long been afraid of, that he was really in love with her; and that, as he put it, if she did not make a fool of herself about him, he was but too likely to end in making a fool of himself about her. However, he must speak, to support his own character as a man of the world;—it would never do to knock under to a country girl in this way;—she might go and boast of it all over the town;—beside, foiled or not, he would not give in without trying her mettle somewhat further.

"Miss Harvey, will you forgive me?"

"I have forgiven you."

"Will you forget?"

"If I can!" she said, with a marked expression, which signified (though, of course, she did not mean Tom to understand it), "some of what is past is too precious, and some too painful, to forget."

"I do not ask you to forget all which has passed!"

"I am afraid that there is nothing which would be any credit to you, Sir, to have remembered."

"Credit or none," said Tom, unabashed, "do not forget one word that I said."

She looked hastily and sidelong round,—"That I am in your power?"

"No! curse it! I wish I had bitten out my tongue before I had said that. No! that I am in your power, Miss Harvey.'

"Sir! I never heard you say that; and if you had, the sooner anything so untrue is forgotten the better."

"I said that I loved you, Grace; and if that does not mean that—"

"Sir! Mr. Thurnall! I cannot, I will not hear! You only insult me, Sir, by speaking thus, when you know that—that you consider me—a thief!" and the poor girl burst into tears again.

"I do not! I do not;" cried Tom, growing really earnest at the sight of her sorrow. "Did I not begin this unhappy talk by begging your pardon for ever having let such a thought cross my mind?"

"But you do! you do! you told me as much at my own door; and I have seen it ever since, till I have almost gone mad under it!"

"I will swear to you by all that is sacred that I do not! Oh, Grace, the first moment I saw you my heart told me that it was impossible; and now, this afternoon, as I listened to you with that sick girl, I felt a wretch for ever having——Grace, I tell you, you made me feel, for the moment, a better man than I ever felt in my life before. A poor return I have made for that, truly!"

Grace looked up in his face gasping.

"Oh, say that! say that again. Oh, good Lord, merciful Lord, at last! Oh, if you knew what it was to have even one weight lifted off, among all my heavy burdens, and that weight the hardest to bear. God forgive me that it should have been so! Oh, I can breathe freely now again, that I know I am not suspected by you."

"By you?" Tom could not but see what, after all, no human being can conceal, that Grace cared for him. And the devil came and tempted him once more: but this time it was in vain. Tom's better angel had returned; Grace's tender guilelessness, which would with too many men only have marked her out as the easier prey, was to him as a sacred shield before her innocence. So noble, so enthusiastic, so pure! He could not play the villain with that woman.

But there was plainly a mystery. What were the burdens, heavier even than unjust suspicion, of which she had spoken? There was no harm in asking.

"But, Grace—Miss Harvey—You will not be angry with me

if I ask?—Why speak so often, as if finding this money depended on you alone? You wish me to recover it, I know; and if you can counsel me, why not do so? Why not tell me whom you suspect?"

Her old wild terror returned in an instant. She stopped short—

"Suspect? I suspect? Oh, I have suspected too many already! Suspected till I began to hate my fellow-creatures—hate life itself, when I fancied that I saw 'thief' written on every forehead. Oh, do not ask me to suspect any more!"

Tom was silent.

"Oh," she cried, after a moment's pause. "Oh, that we were back in those old times I have read of, when they used to put people to the torture to make them confess!"

"Why, in Heaven's name?"

"Because then I should have been tortured, and have confessed it, true or false, in the agony, and have been hanged. They used to hang them then, and put them out of their misery; and I should have been put out of mine, and no one have been blamed but me for evermore."

"You forget," said Tom, lost in wonder, "that then I should have blamed you, as well as every one else."

"True; yes, it was a foolish faithless word. I did not take it, and it would have been no good to my soul to say I did. Lies cannot prosper, cannot prosper, Mr. Thurnall!" and she stopped short again.

"What, my dear Grace?" said he, kindly enough; for he began to fear that she was losing her wits.

"I saved your life!"

"You did, Grace."

"Then, I never thought to ask for payment; but, oh, I must now. Will you promise me one thing in return?"

"What you will, as I am a man and a gentleman; I can trust you to ask nothing which is not worthy of you."

Tom spoke truth. He felt,—perhaps love made him feel it all the more easily,—that whatever was behind, he was safe in that woman's hands.

"Then promise me that you will wait one month, only one month: ask no questions; mention nothing to any living soul. And if, before that time, I do not bring you that belt back, send me to Bodmin Gaol. and let me bear my punishment."

"I promise," said Tom. And the two walked on again in silence, till they neared the head of the village.

Then Grace went forward, like Nausicaa when she left Ulysses, lest the townsfolk should talk; and Tom sat down upon a bank and watched her figure vanishing in the dusk.

Much he puzzled, hunting up and down in his cunning head for an explanation of the mystery. At last he found one which seemed to fit the facts so well, that he rose with a whistle of satisfaction, and walked homewards.

Evidently, her mother had stolen the belt; and Grace was, if not a repentant accomplice—for that he could not believe,—at least aware of the fact.

"Well, it is a hard knot for her to untie, poor child; and on the strength of having saved my life, she shall untie it her own way. I can wait. I hope the money won't be spent meanwhile, though, and the empty leather returned to me when wanted no longer. However, that's done already, if done at all. I was a fool for not acting at once;—a double fool for suspecting her! Ass that I was, to take up with a false scent, and throw myself off the true one! My everlasting unbelief in people has punished itself this time. I might have got a search-warrant three months ago, and had that old witch safe in the bilboes. But no—I might not have found it, after all, and there would have been only an esclandre; and if I know that girl's heart, she would have been ten times more miserable for her mother than for herself, so it's as well as it is. Besides, it's really good fun to watch how such a pretty plot will work itself out;—as good as a pack of harriers with a cold scent and a squatted hare. So, live and let live. Only, Thomas Thurnall, if you go for to come for to go for to make such an abominable ass of yourself with that young lady any more, like a miserable school-boy, you will be pleased to make tracks, and vanish out of these parts for ever. For my purse can't afford to have you marrying a schoolmistress in your impoverished old age; and my character, which also is my purse, can't afford worse."

One word of Grace's had fixed itself in Tom's memory What did she mean by "her two?"

He contrived to ask Willis that very evening.

"Oh, don't you know, Sir? She had a young brother drowned, a long while ago, when she was sixteen or so. He went out fishing on the Sabbath, with another like him, and both were swamped. Wild young lads, both, as lads will be. But she, sweet maid, took it so to heart, that she never held up her head since; nor will, I think, at times, to her dying day."

"Humph! Was she fond of the other lad, then?"

"Sir," said Willis, "I don't think it's fair like,—not decent, if you'll excuse an old sailor,—to talk about young maids' affairs, that they wouldn't talk of themselves, perhaps not even to themselves. So I never asked any questions myself."

"And think it rude in me to ask any. Well, I believe you're right, good old gentleman that you are. What a nobleman

you'd have made, if you had had the luck to have been born in that station of life!"

"I have found too much trouble, in doing my duty in my humble place, to wish to be in any higher one."

"So!" thought Tom to himself, "a girl's fancy: but it explains so much in the character, especially when the temperament is melancholic. However, to quote Solomon once more, 'A live dog is better than a dead lion;' and I have not much to fear from a rival who has been washed out of this world ten years since. Heyday! Rival! quotha? Tom Thurnall, you are going to make a fool of yourself. You must go, Sir! I warn you; you must flee, till you have recovered your senses."

There appeared next morning in Tom's shop a new phenomenon. A smart youth, dressed in what he considered to be the newest London fashion; but which was really that translation of last year's fashion which happened to be current in the windows of the Bodmin tailors. Tom knew him by sight and name,—one Mr. Creed, a squireen like Trebooze, and an especial friend of Trebooze's, under whose tutelage he had learned to smoke cavendish assiduously from the age of fifteen, thereby improving neither his stature, nor his digestion, his nerves, nor the intelligence of his countenance.

He entered with a lofty air, and paused awhile as he spoke.

"Is it possible," said Tom to himself, "that Trebooze has sent me a challenge? It would be too good fun. I'll wait and see." So he went on rolling pills.

"I say, Sir," quoth the youth, who had determined, as an owner of land, to treat the doctor duly *de haut en bas*, and had a vague notion that a liberal use of the word "Sir" would both help thereto, and be consonant with professional style of duel diplomacy, whereof he had read in novels.

Tom turned slowly, and then took a long look at him over the counter through half-shut eye-lids, with chin upraised, as if he had been suddenly afflicted with short sight; and worked on meanwhile steadily at his pills.

"That is, I wish—to speak to you, Sir—ahem!—" went on Mr. Creed; being gradually but surely discomfited by Tom's steady gaze.

"Don't trouble yourself, Sir: I see your case in your face. A slight nervous affection—will pass as the digestion improves. I will make you up a set of pills for the night; but I should advise a little ammonia and valerian at once. May I mix it?"

"Sir! you mistake me, Sir!"

"Not in the least; you have brought me a challenge from Mr. Trebooze."

"I have, Sir!" said the youth with a grand air, at once

relieved by having the awful words said for him, and exalted by the dignity of his first, and perhaps last, employment in that line.

"Well, Sir," said Tom deliberately, "Mr. Trebooze does me a kindness for which I cannot sufficiently thank him, and you also, as his second. It is full six months since I fought, and I was getting hardly to know myself again."

"You will have to fight now, Sir!" said the youth, trying to brazen off by his discourtesy increasing suspicion that he had "caught a Tartar."

"Of course, of course. And of course, too, I fight you afterwards."

"I—I, Sir? I am Mr. Trebooze's friend, his second, Sir. You do not seem to understand, Sir!"

"Pardon me, young gentleman," said Tom, in a very quiet, determined voice; "it is I who have a right to tell you that you do not understand in such matters as these. I had fought my man, and more than one of them, while you were eating blackberries in a short jacket."

"What do you mean, Sir?" quoth the youth in fury; and began swearing a little.

"Simple fact. Are you not about twenty-three years old?"

"What is that to you, Sir?"

"No business of mine, of course. You may be growing into your second childhood for aught I care: but if, as I guess, you are about twenty-three, I, as I know, am thirty-six: then I fought my first duel when you were five years old, and my tenth, I should say, when you were fifteen; at which time, I suppose, you were not ashamed either of the jacket or the blackberries."

"You will find me a man now, Sir, at all events," said Creed, justly wroth at what was, after all, a sophism; for if a man is not a man at twenty, he never will be one.

"*Tant mieux.* You know, I suppose, that as the challenged, I have the choice of weapons?"

"Of course, Sir," said Creed, in an off-hand generous tone, because he did not very clearly know.

"Then, Sir, I always fight across a handkerchief. You will tell Mr. Trebooze so; he is, I really believe, a brave man, and will accept the terms. You will tell yourself the same, whether you be a brave man or not."

The youth lost the last words in those which went before them. He was no coward: would have stood up to be shot at, at fifteen paces, like any one else; but the deliberate butchery of fighting across a handkerchief—

"Do I understand you, Sir?"

"That depends on whether you are clever enough, or not, to

comprehend your native tongue. Across a handkerchief, I say, do you hear that?" And Tom rolled on at his pills.

"I do."

"And when I have fought him, I fight you!" And the pills rolled steadily at the same pace.

"But—Sir?—Why—Sir?"

"Because," said Tom, looking him full in the face, "because you, calling yourself a gentleman, and being, more shame for you, one by birth, dare to come here, for a foolish vulgar superstition called honour, to ask me, a quiet medical man, to go and be shot at by a man whom you know to be a drunken, profligate, blackguard: simply because, as you know as well as I, I interfered to prevent his insulting a poor helpless girl: and in so doing, was forced to give him what you, if you are (as I believe) a gentleman, would have given him also, in my place."

"I don't understand you, Sir!" said the lad, blushing all the while, as one honestly conscience-stricken; for Tom had spoken the exact truth, and he knew it.

"Don't lie, Sir, and tell me that you don't understand; you understand every word which I have spoken, and you know that it is true."

"Lie?"

"Yes, lie. Look you, Sir; I have no wish to fight—"

"You will fight, though, whether you wish it or not," said the youth with a hysterical laugh, meant to be defiant.

"But—I can snuff a candle; I can split a bullet on a penknife at fifteen paces."

"Do you mean to frighten us by boasting? We shall see what you can do when you come on the ground."

"Across a handkerchief: but on no other condition; and, unless you will accept that condition, I will assuredly, the next time I see you, be we where we may, treat you as I treated your friend Mr. Treebooze.——I'll do it now! Get out of my shop, Sir! What do you want here, interfering with my honest business?"

And, to the astonishment of Mr. Trebooze's second, Tom vaulted clean over the counter, and rushed at him open-mouthed.

Sacred be the honour of the gallant West country: but, "both being friends," as Aristotle has it, "it is a sacred duty to speak the truth." Mr. Creed vanished through the open door.

"I rid myself of the fellow jollily," said Tom to Frank that day, after telling him the whole story. "And no credit to me. I saw from the minute he came in there was no fight in him."

"But suppose he had accepted—or suppose Trebooze accepts still?"

"There was my game—to frighten him. He'll take care Trebooze shan't fight, for he knows that he must fight next. He'll go home and patch the matter up, trust him. Meanwhile, the oaf had not even *savoir faire* enough to ask for my second. Lucky for me; for I don't know where to have found one, save the Lieutenant; and though he would have gone out safe enough, it would have been a bore for the good old fellow."

"And," said Frank, utterly taken aback by Tom's business-like levity, "you would actually have stood to shoot, and be shot at, across a handkerchief?"

Tom stuck out his great chin, and looked at him with one of his quaint sidelong moues.

"You are my very good friend, Sir: but not my father-confessor."

"I know that: but really—as a mere question of human curiosity"—

"Oh, if you ask me on the human ground, and not on the sacerdotal, I'll tell you. I've tried it twice, and I should be sorry to try it again; though it's a very easy dodge. Keep your right elbow up—up to your ear—and the moment you hear the word, fire. A high elbow and a cool heart—that's all; and that wins."

"Wins? Good heavens? As you are here alive you must have killed your man?"

"No. I only shot my men each through the body; and each of them deserved it: but it is an ugly chance; I should have been sorry to try it on that yokel. The boy may make a man yet. And what's more," said Tom, bursting into a great laugh, "he will make a man, and go down to his fathers in peace, *quant à moi;* and so will that wretched Trebooze. For I'll bet you my head to a China orange, I hear no more of this matter; and don't even lose Trebooze's custom."

"Upon my word, I envy your sanguine temperament!"

"Mr. Headley, I shall quietly make my call at Trebooze to-morrow, as if nothing had happened. What will you bet me that I am not received as usual?"

"I never bet," said Frank.

"Then you do well. It is a foolish and a dirty trick; playing with edge tools, and cutting one's own fingers. Nevertheless, I speak truth, as you will see."

"You are a most extraordinary man. All this is so contrary to your usual caution."

"When you are driven against the ropes, 'hit out' is the old rule of Fistiana and common sense. It is an extreme bore: all the more reason for showing such an ugly front, as to give people no chance of its happening again. Nothing so dangerous as

half-measures, Headley. 'Resist the devil, and he will flee from you,' your creed says. Mine only translates it into practice."

"I have no liking for half-measures myself."

"Did you ever," said Tom, "hear the story of the two Sandhurst broomsquires?"

"Broomsquires?"

"So we call, in Berkshire, squatters on the moor who live by tying heath into brooms. Two of them met in Reading market once, and fell out:—

"'How ever do you manage to sell your brooms for three halfpence? I steals the heth, and I steals the binds, and I steals the handles: and yet I can't afoord to sell 'em under twopence.'

"'Ah, but you see,' says the other, 'I steals mine ready made.'

"Moral—If you're going to do a thing, do it outright."

That very evening, Tom came in again.

"Well; I've been to Trebooze."

"And fared, how?"

"Just as I warned you. Inquired into his symptoms; prescribed for his digestion—if he goes on as he is doing, he will will soon have none left to prescribe for; and, finally, plastered, with a sublime generosity, the nose which my own knuckles had contused."

"Impossible! you are the most miraculously impudent of men!"

"Pish! simple common sense. I knew that Mrs. Trebooze would suspect that the world had heard of his mishap, and took care to let her know that I knew, by coming up to inquire for him."

"*Cui bono?*"

"Power. To have them, or any one, a little more in my power. Next, I knew that he dared not fly out at me, for fear I should tell Mrs. Trebooze what he had been after—you see? Ah, it was delicious to have the great oaf sitting sulking under my fingers, longing to knock my head off, and I plastering away, with words of deepest astonishment and condolence. I verily believe that, before we parted, I had persuaded him that his black eye proceeded entirely from his having run up against a tree in the dark."

"Well," said Frank, half sadly, though enjoying the joke in spite of himself, "I cannot help thinking it would have been a fit moment for giving the poor wretch a more solemn lesson."

"My dear Sir,—a good licking—and he had one, and something over—is the best lesson for that manner of biped. That's the way to school him: but as we are on lessons, I'll give you a hint."

"Go on, model of self-sufficiency!" said Frank.

"Scoff at me if you will, I am proof. But hearken—you mustn't turn out that schoolmistress. She's an angel, and I know it; and if I say so of any human being, you may be sure I have pretty good reasons."

"I am beginning to be of your mind myself," said Frank.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CRUISE OF THE WATERWITCH.

The middle of August is come at last; and with it the solemn day on which Frederick Viscount Scoutbush may be expected to revisit the home of his ancestors. Elsley has gradually made up his mind to the inevitable, with a stately sulkiness: and comforts himself, as the time draws near, with the thought that, after all, his brother-in-law is not a very formidable personage.

But to the population of Aberalva in general, the coming event is one of awful jubilation. The shipping is all decked with flags; all the Sunday clothes have been looked out, and many a yard of new ribbon and pound of bad powder bought; there have been arrangements for a procession, which could not be got up; for a speech which nobody would undertake to pronounce; and, lastly, for a dinner, about which last there was no hanging back. Yea, also, they have hired from Carcarrow Church-town, sackbut, psaltery, dulcimer, and all kinds of music; for Frank has put down the old choir band at Aberalva,—another of his mistakes,—and there is but one fiddle and a clarionet now left in all the town. So the said town waits all the day on tiptoe, ready to worship, till out of the soft brown haze the stately Waterwitch comes sliding in, like a white ghost, to fold her wings in Aberalva bay.

And at that sight the town is all astir. Fishermen shake themselves up out of their mid-day snooze, to admire the beauty, as she slips on and on through water smooth as glass, her hull hidden by the vast curve of the balloon-jib, and her broad wings boomed out alow and aloft, till it seems marvellous how that vast screen does not topple headlong, instead of floating (as it seems) self-supporting above its image in the mirror. Women hurry to put on their best bonnets; the sexton toddles up with the church key in his hand, and the ringers at his heels; the Coast-guard Lieutenant bustles down to the Manby's mortar, which he has hauled out in readiness on the pebbles. Old Willis hoists a flag before his house. and half-a-dozen merchant skippers

do the same. Bang goes the harmless mortar, burning the British nation's powder without leave or licence; and all the rocks and woods catch up the echo, and kick it from cliff to cliff, playing at football with it till its breath is beaten out; a rolling fire of old muskets and bird-pieces crackles along the shore, and in five minutes a poor lad has blown a ramrod through his hand. Never mind, lords do not visit Penalva every day. Out burst the bells above with merry peal; Lord Scoutbush and the Waterwitch are duly "rung in" to the home of his lordship's ancestors; and he is received, as he scrambles up the pier steps from his boat, by the Curate, the Churchwardens, the Lieutenant, and old Tardrew, backed by half-a-dozen ancient sons of Anak, lineal descendants of the free fishermen to whom six hundred years before, St. Just of Penalva did grant privileges hard to spell, and harder to understand, on the condition of receiving, whensoever he should land at the quay head, three brass farthings from the "free fishermen of Aberalva."

Scoutbush shakes hands with Curate, Lieutenant, Tardrew, Churchwardens; and then come forward the three farthings, in an ancient leather purse.

"Hope your lordship will do us the honour to shake hands with us too; we are your lordship's free fishermen, as we have been your forefathers'," says a magnificent old man, gracefully acknowledging the feudal tie, while he claims the exemption.

Little Scoutbush, who is the kindest-hearted of men, clasps the great brown fist in his little white one, and shakes hands heartily with every one of them, saying,—"If your forefathers were as much taller than mine, as you are than me, gentlemen, I shouldn't wonder if they took their own freedom, without asking his leave for it!"

A lord who begins his progress with a jest! That is the sort of aristocrat to rule in Aberalva! And all agree that evening, at the Mariners' Rest, that his lordship is as nice a young gentleman as ever trod deal board, and deserves such a yacht as he's got, and long may he sail her!

How easy it is to buy the love of men! Gold will not do it: but there is a little angel, may be, in the corner of every man's eye, who is worth more than gold, and can do it free of all charges: unless a man drives him out, and "hates his brother; and so walks in darkness; not knowing whither he goeth," but running full butt against men's prejudices, and treading on their corns, till they knock him down in despair—and all just because he will not open his eyes, and use the light which comes by common human good-nature!

Presently Tom hurries up, having been originally one of the deputation, but kept by the necessity of binding up the three

fingers which the ramrod had spared to poor Jem Burman's hand. He bows, and the Lieutenant—who (Frank being a little shy) acts as her Majesty's representative—introduces him as "deputy medical man to our district of the union, Sir: Mr. Thurnall."

"Dr. Heale was to have been here, by the bye. Where is Dr. Heale?" says some one.

"Very sorry, my lord; I can answer for him—professional calls, I don't doubt—nobody more devoted to your lordship."

One need not inquire where Dr. Heale was: but if elderly men will drink much brandy-and-water in hot summer days, after a heavy early dinner, then will those men be too late for deputations and for more important employments.

"Never mind the Doctor, dare say he's asleep after dinner: do him good!" says the Viscount, hitting the mark with a random shot; and thereby raising his repute for sagacity immensely with his audience, who laugh outright.

"Ah! Is it so, then? But—Mr. Thurnall, I think you said?—I am glad to make your acquaintance, Sir. I have heard your name often: you are my friend Mellot's old friend, are you not?"

"I am a very old friend of Claude Mellot's."

"Well, and there he is on board, and will be delighted to do the honours of my yacht to you whenever you like to visit her. You and I must know each other better, Sir."

Tom bows low—his lordship does him too much honour: the cunning fellow knows that his fortune is made in Aberalva, if he choses to work it out: but he humbly slips into the rear, for Frank has to be supported, not being over popular; and the Lieutenant may "turn crusty," unless he has his lordship to himself, before the gaze of assembled Aberalva.

Scoutbush progresses up the street, bowing right and left, and stopped half-a-dozen times by red-cloaked old women, who curtsey under his nose, and will needs inform him how they knew his grandfather, or nursed his uncle, or how his "dear mother, God rest her soul, gave me this very cloak as I have on," and so forth; till Scoutbush comes to the conclusion that they are a very loving and loveable set of people—as indeed they are—and his heart smites him somewhat for not having seen more of them in past years.

No sooner is Thurnall released, than he is off to the yacht as fast as oars can take him, and in Claude's arms.

"Now!" (after all salutations and inquiries have been gone through,) "let me introduce you to Major Campbell." And Tom was presented to a tall and thin personage, who sat at the cabin table, bending over a microscope.

"Excuse my rising," said he, holding out a left hand, for the right was busy. "A single jar will give me ten minutes' work

to do again. I am delighted to meet you: Mellot has often spoken to me of you as a man who has seen more, and faced death more carelessly, than most men."

"Mellot flatters, Sir. Whatsoever I have done, I have given up being careless about death; for I have some one beside myself to live for."

"Married at last? has Diogenes found his Aspasia?" cried Claude.

Tom did not laugh.

"Since my brothers died, Claude, the old gentleman has only me to look to. You seem to be a naturalist, Sir."

"A dabbler," said the Major, with eye and hand still busy.

"I ought not to begin our acquaintance by doubting your word: but these things are no dabbler's work;" and Tom pointed to some exquisite photographs of minute corallines, evidently taken under the microscope.

"They are Mellot's."

"Mellot turned man of science? Impossible!"

"No; only photographer. I am tired of painting nature clumsily, and then seeing a sun-picture out-do all my efforts—so I am turned photographer, and have made a vow against painting for three years and a day."

"Why, the photographs only give you light and shade."

"They will give you colour, too, before seven years are over—and that is more than I can do, or any one else. No; I yield to the new dynasty. The artist's occupation is gone henceforth, and the painter's studio, like 'all charms, must fly, at the mere touch of cold philosophy.' So Major Campbell prepares the charming little cockyoly birds, and I call in the sun to immortalize them."

"And perfectly you are succeeding! They are quite new to me, recollect. When I left Melbourne, the art had hardly risen there above guinea portraits of bearded desperadoes, a nugget in one hand and a 50*l.* note in the other: but this is a new, and what a forward step for science!"

"You are a naturalist, then?" said Campbell, looking up with interest.

"All my profession are, more or less," said Tom, carelessly; "and I have been lucky enough here to fall on untrodden ground, and have hunted up a few sea-monsters this summer."

"Really? You can tell one where to search then, and where to dredge, I hope. I have set my heart on a fortnight's work here, and have been dreaming at night, like a child before a Twelfth-night party, of all sorts of impossible hydras, gorgons, and chimæras dire, fished up from your western deeps."

"I have none of them; but I can give you Turbinolia Milletiana and Zoanthus Couchii. I have a party of the last gentlemen alive on shore."

The Major's face worked with almost childish delight.

"But I shall be robbing you."

"They cost me nothing, my dear Sir. I did very well, moreover, without them, for five-and-thirty years; and I may do equally well for five-and-thirty more."

"I ought to be able to say the same, surely," answered the Major, composing his face again, and rising carefully. "I have to thank you, exceedingly, my dear Sir, for your prompt generosity: but it is better discipline for a man, in many ways, to find things for himself than to have them put into his hands. So, with a thousand thanks, you shall let me see if I can dredge a Turbinolia for myself."

This was spoken with so sweet and polished a modulation and yet so sadly and severely withal, that Tom looked at the speaker with interest.

He was a very tall and powerful man, and would have been a very handsome man, both in face and figure, but for the high cheekbone, long neck, and narrow shoulders, so often seen north of Tweed. His brow was very high and full; his eyes—grave, but very gentle, with large drooping eyelids—were buried under shaggy grey eyebrows. His mouth was gentle as his eyes; but compressed, perhaps by the habit of command, perhaps by secret sorrow; for of that, too, as well as of intellect and magnanimity, Thurnall thought he could discern the traces. His face was bronzed by long exposure to the sun; his close-cut curls, which had once been auburn, were fast turning white, though his features looked those of a man under five-and-forty; his cheeks were as smooth shaven as his chin. A right, self-possessed, valiant soldier he looked; one who could be very loving to little innocents, and very terrible to full-grown knaves.

"You are practising at self-denial, as usual," said Claude.

"Because I may, at any moment, have to exercise it in earnest. Mr. Thurnall, can you tell me the name of this little glass arrow, which I just found shooting about in the sweeping net?"

Tom did know the wonderful little link between the fish and the insect; and the two chatted over its strange form, till the boat returned to take them ashore.

"Do you make any stay here?"

"I purpose to spend a fortnight here in my favourite pursuit. I must draw on your kindness and knowledge of the place to point me out lodgings."

Lodgings, as it befell, were to be found, and good ones, close to the beach, and away from the noise of the harbour, on Mrs.

Harvey's first floor; for the local preacher, who generally occupied them, was away.

"But Major Campbell might dislike the noise of the school?"

"The school? What better music for a lonely old bachelor than children's voices?"

So, by sunset the Major was fairly established over Mrs. Harvey's shop. It was not the place which Tom would have chosen; he was afraid of "running over" poor Grace, if he came in and out as often as he could have wished. Nevertheless, he accepted the Major's invitation to visit him that very evening.

"I cannot ask you to dinner yet, Sir; for my ménage will be hardly settled: but a cup of coffee, and an exceedingly good cigar, I think my establishment may furnish you by seven o'clock to-night;—if you think them worth walking down for."

Tom, of course, said something civil, and made his appearance in due time. He found the coffee ready, and the cigars also; but the Major was busy, in his shirt sleeves, unpacking and arranging jars, nets, microscopes, and what not of scientific lumber; and Tom proffered his help.

"I am ashamed to make use of you the first moment that you become my guest."

"I shall enjoy the mere handling of your tackle," said Tom; and began breaking the tenth commandment over almost every article he touched; for everything was first-rate of its kind.

"You seem to have devoted money, as well as thought, plentifully to the pursuit."

"I have little else to which to devote either; and more of both than is, perhaps, safe for me."

"I should hardly complain of a superfluity of thought, if superfluity of money was the condition of it."

"Pray understand me. I am no Dives; but I have learned to want so little, that I hardly know how to spend the little which I have."

"I should hardly have called that an unsafe state."

"The penniless Faquir who lives on chance handfuls of rice has his dangers, as well as the rich Parsee who has his ventures out from Madagascar to Canton. Yes, I have often envied the schemer, the man of business, almost the man of pleasure; their many wants at least absorb them in outward objects, instead of leaving them too easily satisfied, to sink in upon themselves, and waste away in useless dreams."

"You found out the best cure for that malady when you took up the microscope and the collecting-box."

"So I fancied once. I took up natural history in India years

ago to drive away thought, as other men might take to opium, or to brandy-pawnee: but, like them, it has become a passion now and a tyranny; and I go on hunting, discovering, wondering, craving for more knowledge; and—*cui bono?* I sometimes ask—"

"Why, this at least, Sir; that, without such men as you, who work for mere love, Science would be now fifty years behind her present standing-point; and we doctors should not know a thousand important facts, which you have been kind enough to tell us, while we have not time to find them out for ourselves."

"*Sic vos non vobis*—"

"Yes, you have the work, and we have the pay; which is a very fair division of labour, considering the world we live in."

"And have you been skilful enough to make science pay you here, in such an out-of-the-way little world as that of Aberalva must be?"

"She is a good stalking-horse anywhere;" and Tom detailed, with plenty of humour, the effect of his microscope and his lecture on the drops of water. But his wit seemed so much lost on Campbell, that he at last stopped almost short, not quite sure that he had not taken a liberty.

"No; go on, I beg you; and do not fancy that I am not interested and amused too, because my laughing muscles are a little stiff from want of use. Perhaps, too, I am apt to take things too much *au grand sérieux;* but I could not help thinking, while you were speaking, how sad it was that people were utterly ignorant of matters so vitally necessary to health."

"And I, perhaps, ought not to jest over the subject: but, indeed, with cholera staring us in the face here, I must indulge in some emotion; and as it is unprofessional to weep, I must laugh as long as I dare."

The Major dropped his coffee-cup upon the floor, and looked at Thurnall with so horrified a gaze, that Tom could hardly believe him to be the same man. Then recollecting himself, he darted down upon the remains of his cup: and looking up again—"A thousand pardons; but—did I hear you aright? cholera staring us in the face?"

"How can it be otherwise? It is drawing steadily on from the eastward week by week; and, in the present state of the town, nothing but some miraculous caprice of Dame Fortune's can deliver us."

"Don't talk of Fortune, Sir! at such a moment. Talk of God!" said the Major, rising from his chair, and pacing the room. "It is too horrible! Intolerable! When do you expect it here?"

"Within the month, perhaps,—hardly before. I should have

warned you of the danger, I assure you, had I not understood from you that you were only going to stay a fortnight."

The Major made an impatient gesture.

"Do you fancy that I am afraid for myself? No; but the thought of its coming to—to the poor people in the town, you know. It is too dreadful. I have seen it in India—among my own men—among the natives. Good heavens, I never shall forget—and to meet the fiend again here, of all places in the world! I fancied it so clean and healthy, swept by fresh sea-breezes."

"And by nothing else. A half-hour's walk round would convince you, Sir; I only wish that you could persuade his lordship to accompany you."

"Scoutbush? Of course he will,—he shall,—he must. Good heavens! whose concern is it more than his? You think, then, that there is a chance of staving it off—by cleansing, I mean?"

"If we have heavy rains during the next week or two, yes. If this drought last, better leave ill alone; we shall only provoke the devil by stirring him up."

"You speak confidently," said the Major, gradually regaining his own self-possession, as he saw Tom so self-possessed. "Have you—allow me to ask so important a question—have you seen much of cholera?"

"I have worked through three. At Paris, at St. Petersburgh, and in the West Indies: and I have been thinking up my old experience for the last six weeks, foreseeing what would come."

"I am satisfied, Sir; perhaps I ought to ask your pardon for the question."

"Not at all. How can you trust a man, unless you know him?"

"And you expect it within the month? You shall go with me to Lord Scoutbush to-morrow, and—and now we will talk of something more pleasant." And he began again upon the zoophites.

Tom, as they chatted on, could not help wondering at the Major's unexpected passion; and could not help remarking, also, that in spite of his desire to be agreeable, and to interest his guest in his scientific discoveries, he was yet distraught, and full of other thoughts. What could be the meaning of it? Was it mere excess of human sympathy? The countenance hardly betokened that: but still, who can trust altogether the expression of a weather-hardened visage of forty-five? So the Doctor set it down to tenderness of heart, till a fresh vista opened on him.

Major Campbell, he soon found, was as fond of insects as of sea-monsters: and he began inquiring about the woods, the

heaths, the climate; which seemed to the Doctor, for a long time, to mean nothing more than the question which he put plainly, "Where have I a chance of rare insects?" But he seemed, after a while, to be trying to learn the geography of the parish in detail, and especially of the ground round Vavasour's house. "However, it's no business of mine," thought Thurnall, and told him all he wanted, till—

"Then the house lies quite in the bottom of the glen? Is there a good fall to the stream—for a stream I suppose there is?"

Thurnall shook his head. "Cold boggy stewponds in the garden, such as our ancestors loved, damming up the stream. They must needs have fish in Lent, we know; and paid the penalty of it by ague and fever."

"Stewponds damming up the stream? Scoutbush ought to drain them instantly!" said the Major, half to himself. "But still the house lies high—with regard to the town, I mean. No chance of malaria coming up?"

"Upon my word, Sir, as a professional man, that is a thing that I dare not say. The chances are not great—the house is two hundred yards from the nearest cottage: but if there be an east wind—"

"I cannot bear this any longer. It is perfect madness!"

"I trust, Sir, that you do not think that I have neglected the matter. I have pointed it all out, I assure you, to Mr. Vavasour."

"And it is not altered?"

"I believe it is to be altered—that is—the truth is, Sir, that Mr. Vavasour shrinks so much from the very notion of cholera, that—"

"That he does not like to do anything which may look like believing in its possibility?"

"He says," quoth Tom, parrying the question, but in a somewhat dry tone, "that he is afraid of alarming Mrs. Vavasour and the servants."

The Major said something under his breath, which Tom did not catch, and then, in an appeased tone of voice—

"Well, that is at least a fault on the right side. Mrs. Vavasour's brother, as owner of the place, is of course the proper person to make the house fit for habitation." And he relapsed into silence, while Thurnall, who suspected more than met the ear, rose to depart.

"Are you going? It is not late; not ten o'clock yet."

"A medical man, who may be called up at any moment, must make sure of his 'beauty sleep.'"

"I will walk with you, and smoke my last cigar."

So they went out, and up to Heale's. Tom went in: but he observed that his companion, after standing awhile in the street

irresolutely, went on up the hill, and, as far as he could see, turned up the lane to Vavasour's.

"A mystery here," thought he, as he put matters to-rights in the surgery ere going upstairs. "A mystery which I may as well fathom. It may be of use to poor Tom, as most other mysteries are. That is, though, if I can do it honourably; for the man is a gallant gentleman. I like him, and I am inclined to trust him. Whatsoever his secret is, I don't think that it is one which he need be ashamed of. Still, 'there's a deal of human natur' in man,' and there may be in him:—and what matter if there is?"

Half an hour afterwards the Major returned, took the candle from Grace, who was sitting up for him, and went upstairs with a gentle "good-night," but without looking at her.

He sat down at the open window, and looked out leaning on the sill.

"Well, I was too late; I daresay there was some purpose in it. When shall I learn to believe that God takes better care of His own than I can do? I was faithless and impatient to-night. I am afraid I betrayed myself before that man. He looks like one, certainly, who could be trusted with a secret: yet I had rather that he had not mine. It is my own fault, like everything else! Foolish old fellow that you are, fretting and fussing to the end! Is not that scene a message from above, saying, 'Be still, and know that I am God'?"

And the Major looked out upon the summer sea, lit by a million globes of living fire, and then upon the waves which broke in flame upon the beach, and then up to the spangled stars above.

"What do I know of these, with all my knowing? Not even a twentieth part of those medusæ, or one in each thousand of those sparks among the foam. Perhaps I need not know. And yet why was the thirst awakened in me, save to be satisfied at last? Perhaps to become more intense, with every fresh delicious draught of knowledge. . . . Death, beautiful, wise, kind death; when will you come and tell me what I want to know? I courted you once and many a time, brave old Death, only to give rest to the weary. That was a coward's wish, and so you would not come. I ran you close in Affghanistan, old Death, and at Sobraon too, I was not far behind you; and I thought I had you safe among that jungle grass at Aliwal; but you slipped through my hand—I was not worthy of you. And now I will not hunt you any more, old Death: do you bide your time, and I mine; though who knows if I may not meet you here? Only when you come, give me not rest, but work. Give work to the idle freedom to the chained, sight to the blind!—Tell me a little

about finer things than zoophytes—perhaps about the zoophytes as well—and you shall still be brave old Death, my good camp-comrade now for many a year."

Was Major Campbell mad? That depends upon the way in which the reader may choose to define the adjective.

* * * * * *

Meanwhile Scoutbush had walked into Penalva Court—where an affecting scene of reconciliation took place?

Not in the least. Scoutbush kissed Lucia, shook hands with Elsley, hugged the children, and then settled himself in an arm-chair, and talked about the weather, exactly as if he had been running in and out of the house every week for the last three years, and so the matter was done; and for the first time a *partie carrée* was assembled in the dining-room.

The evening passed off at first as uncomfortably as it could, where three out of the four were well-bred people. Elsley was, of course, shy before Lord Scoutbush, and Scoutbush was equally shy before Elsley, though as civil as possible to him; for the little fellow stood in extreme awe of Elsley's talents, and was afraid of opening his lips before a poet. Lucia was nervous for both their sakes, as well she might be; and Valencia had to make all the talking, and succeeded capitally in drawing out both her brother and her brother-in-law, till both of them found the other, on the whole, more like other people than he had expected. The next morning's breakfast, therefore, was easy and gracious enough; and when it was over, and Lucia fled to household matters—

"You smoke, Vavasour?" asked Scoutbush.

Vavasour did not smoke.

"Really? I thought poets always smoked. You will not forbid my having a cigar in your garden, nevertheless, I suppose? Do walk round with me, too, and show me the place, unless you are going to be busy."

Oh no; Elsley was at Lord Scoutbush's service, of course, and had really nothing to do. So out they went.

"Charming old pigeon-hole it is," said its owner. "I have not seen it since I went into the Guards. Campbell says it's a shame of me, and so it is one, I suppose; but how beautiful you have made the garden look!"

"Lucia is very fond of gardening," said Elsley, who was very fond of it also, and had great taste therein; but he was afraid to confess any such tastes before a man who, he thought, would not understand him.

"And that fine old wood—full of cocks it used to be—I hope you worked it well, last year."

Elsley did not shoot; but he had heard there was plenty of game there.

"Plenty of cocks," said his guest, correcting him; "but for game, the less we say about that the better. I really wonder you do not shoot; it fills up time so in the winter."

"There is really no winter to fill up here, thanks to this delicious climate; and I have my books."

"Ah! I wish I had. I wish heartily," said he, in a confidential tone, "you, or Campbell, or some of your clever men, would sell me a little of their book-learning; as Valencia says to me, 'brains are so common in the world, I wonder how none fell to your share.'"

"I do not think that they are an article which is for sale, if Solomon is to be believed."

"And if they were, I couldn't afford to buy, with this Irish Encumbered Estates' Bill. But now, this is one thing I wanted to say. Is everything here just as you would wish? Of course no one could wish a better tenant; but any repairs, you know, or improvements which I ought to do of course? Only tell me what you think should be done; for, of course, you know more about these things than I do—can't know less."

"Nothing, I assure you, Lord Scoutbush. I have always left those matters to Mr. Tardrew."

"Ah, my dear fellow, you shouldn't do that. He is such a screw, as all honest stewards are. Screws me, I know, and I dare say has screwed you too."

"Never, I assure you. I never gave him the opportunity, and he has been most civil."

"Well, in future, just order him to do what you like, and just as if you were landlord, in fact; and if the old man haggles, write to me, and I'll blow him up. Delighted to have a man of taste like you here, who can improve the place for me."

"I assure you, Lord Scoutbush, I need nothing, nor does the place. I am a man of very few wants."

"I wish I were," sighed Scoutbush, pulling out another of Hudson's highest-priced cigars.

"And I am bound to say"—(and here Elsley choked a little; but the Viscount's frankness and humility had softened him, and he determined to be very magnanimous)—"I am bound in honour, after owing to your kindness such an exquisite retreat—all that either I or Lucia could have fancied for ourselves, and more—not to trouble you by asking for little matters which we really do not need."

And so Elsley, instead of simply asking to have the house-drains set right, which Lord Scoutbush would have had done

upon the spot, chose to be lofty-minded, at the risk of killing his wife and children.

"My dear fellow, you really must not 'lord' me any more; I hate it. I must be plain Scoutbush here among my own people, just as I am in the Guards' mess-room. And as for owing me any, – really, it is we that are in your debt—to see my sister so happy, and such beautiful children, and so well too —and altogether—and Valencia so delighted with your poems —and, and altogether—" and there Lord Scoutbush stopped, having hoisted, as he considered, the flag of peace once and for all, and very glad that the thing was over.

Elsley was going to say something in return; but his guest turned the conversation as fast as he could. "And now, I know you want to be busy, though you are too civil to confess it; and I must be with that old fool Tardrew at ten, to settle accounts: he'll scold me if I do not—the precise old pedant—just as if I was his own child. Good-bye."

"Where are you going, Frederick?" called Lucia, from the window; she had been watching the interview anxiously enough, and could see that it had ended well.

"To old Stot-and-kye at the farm: do you want anything?"

"No; only I thought you might be going to the yacht; and Valencia would have walked down with you. She wants to find Major Campbell."

"I want to scold Major Campbell," said Valencia, tripping out on the lawn in her walking dress. "Why has he not been here an hour ago? I will undertake to say that he was up at four this morning."

"He waits to be invited, I suppose," said Scoutbush.

"I suppose I must do it," said Elsley to himself, sighing.

"Just like his primness," said Valencia. "I shall go down and bring him up myself this minute, and Mr. Vavasour shall come with me. Of course you will! You do not know what a delightful person he is, when once you can break the ice."

Elsley, like most vain men, was of a jealous temper; and Valencia's eagerness to see Major Campbell jarred on him. He wanted to keep the exquisite creature to himself, and Headley was quite enough of an intruder already. Beside, the accounts of the new comer, his learning, his military prowess, the reverence with which all, even Scoutbush, evidently regarded him, made him prepared to dislike the Major; and all the more, now he heard that there was an ice-crust to crack. Impulsive men like Elsley, especially when their self-respect and certainty of their own position is not very strong, have instinctively a defiant fear of the strong, calm, self-contained man, especially if he has seen the world; and Elsley set down Major Campbell as a proud,

sarcastic fellow, before whom he must be at the pains of being continually on his guard. He wished him a hundred miles away. However, there was no refusing Valencia anything; so he got his hat, but with so bad a grace, that Valencia saw his chagrin, and from mere naughtiness of heart amused herself with it by talking all the way of nothing but Major Campbell.

"And Lucia," she said at last, "will be so glad to see him again. We knew him so well, you know, in Eaton Square years ago."

"Really," said Elsley, wincing, "I never met him there." He recollected that Lucia had expressed more pleasure at Major Campbell's coming than even at that of her brother; and a dark, undefined phantom entered his heart, which, though he would have been too proud to confess it to himself, was none other than jealousy.

"Oh—did you not? No; it was the year before we first knew you. And we used to laugh at him together, behind his back, and christened him the wild Indian, because he was so gauche and shy. He was a major in the Indian army then: but a few months afterwards he sold out, went into the line—no one could tell why, for he threw away very brilliant prospects, they say, and might have been a general by now, instead of a mere major still. But he is so improved since then; he is like an elder brother to Scoutbush; guides him in everything. I call him the blind man, and the major his dog!"

"So much the worse," thought Elsley, who disliked the notion of Campbell's having power over a man to whom he was indebted for his house-room: but by this time they were at Mrs. Harvey's door.

Mrs. Harvey opened it, curtseying to the very ground: and Valencia ran upstairs, and knocked at the sitting-room door herself.

"Come in," shouted a pre-occupied voice inside.

"Is that a proper way in which to address a lady, Sir?" answered she, putting in her beautiful head.

Major Campbell was sitting, Elsley could see, in his shirt sleeves, cigar in mouth, bent over his microscope: but instead of the unexpected prim voice, he heard a very gay and arch one answer, "Is that a proper way in which to come peeping into an old bachelor's sanctuary, Ma'am? Go away this moment, till I make myself fit to be seen."

Valencia shut the door again, laughing.

"You seem very intimate with Major Campbell," said Elsley.

"Intimate? I look on him as my father almost. Now, may we come in?" said she, knocking again in pretty petulance. "I want to introduce Mr. Vavasour."

"I shall be only too happy," said the Major, opening his door (this time with his coat on); "there are few persons in the world whom I have more wished to know than Mr. Vavasour." And he held out his hand, and quite led Elsley in. He spoke in a tone of grave interest, looking intently at Elsley as he spoke. Valencia remarked the interest—Elsley only the compliment.

"It is a great kindness of you to call on me so soon," said he. "I met Mrs. Vavasour several times in years past; and though I saw very little of her, I saw enough to long much for the acquaintance of the man who has been worthy to become her husband."

Elsley blushed, for his conscience smote him a little at that word "worthy," and muttered some common-place civility in return. Valencia saw it, and attributing it to his usual awkwardness, drew off the conversation to herself.

"Really, Major Campbell! You bring in Mr. Vavasour, and let me walk behind as I can; and then let me sit three whole minutes in your house without deigning to speak to me!"

"Ah! my dear Queen Whims!" answered he, returning suddenly to his gay tone; "and how have you been misbehaving yourself since we met last?"

"I have not been misbehaving myself at all, mon cher Saint Père, as Mr. Vavasour will answer for me, during the most delightful fortnight I ever spent!"

"Delightful indeed!" said Elsley, as he was bound to say: but he said it with an earnestness which made the Major fix his eyes on him. "Why should he not find any and every fortnight as delightful as his last?" said he to himself; but now Valencia began bantering him about his books and his animals; wanting to look through his microscope, pulling off her hat for the purpose, laughing when her curls blinded her, letting them blind her in order to toss them back in the prettiest way, jesting at him about "his old fogies" at the Linnæan Society; clapping her hands in ecstasy when he answered that they were not old fogies at all, but the most charming set of men in England, and that (with no offence to the name of Scoutbush) he was prouder of being an F.L.S., than if he were a peer of the realm,—and so forth; all which harmless pleasantry made Elsley cross, and more cross—first, because he did not mix in it; next, because he could not mix in it if he tried. He liked to be always in the seventh heaven; and if other people were anywhere else, he thought them bores.

At last,—"Now, if you will be good for five minutes," said the Major, "I will show you something really beautiful."

"I can see that," answered she, with the most charming impudence, "in another glass besides your magnifying one."

"Be it so: but look here, and see what an exquisite world there is, of which you never dream; and which behaves a great deal better in its station than the world of which you do dream!"

When Campbell spoke in that way, Valencia was good at once; and as she went obediently to the microscope, she whispered, "Don't be angry with me, mon Saint Père."

"Don't be naughty, then, *ma chère enfant*," whispered he; for he saw something about Elsley's face which gave him a painful suspicion.

She looked long, and then lifted up her head suddenly—"Do come and look, Mr. Vavasour, at this exquisite little glass fairy, like—I cannot tell what like, but a pure spirit hovering in some nun's dream! Come!"

Elsley came, and looked; and when he looked he started, for it was the very same zoophyte which Thurnall had shown him on a certain memorable day.

"Where did you find the fairy, mon Saint Père?"

"I had no such good fortune. Mr. Thurnall, the doctor, gave it me."

"Thurnall?" said she, while Elsley kept still looking, to hide cheeks which were growing very red. "He is such a clever man, they say. Where did you meet him? I have often thought of asking Mr. Vavasour to invite him up for an evening with his microscope. He seems so superior to the people round him. It would be a charity, really, Mr. Vavasour."

"Vavasour kept his eyes fixed on the zoophyte, and said,—

"I shall be only too delighted, if you wish it."

"You will wish it yourself a second time," chimed in Campbell, "if you try it once. Perhaps you know nothing of him but professionally. Unfortunately for professional men, that too often happens."

"Know anything of him—I? I assure you not, save that he attends Mrs. Vavasour and the children," said Vavasour, looking up at last: but with an expression of anger which astonished both Valencia and Campbell.

Campbell thought that he was too proud to allow rank as a gentleman to a country doctor; and despised him from that moment, though, as it happened, unjustly. But he answered quietly,—

"I assure you, that whatever some country practitioners may be, the average of them, as far as I have seen, are cleverer men, and even of higher tone than their neighbours; and Thurnall is beyond the average: he is a man of the world,—even too much of one,—and a man of science; and I fairly confess that, what with his wit, his *savoir vivre*, and his genial good temper, I have

quite fallen in love with him in a single evening; we began last night on the microscope, and ended on all heaven and earth."

"How I should like to make a third!"

"My dear Queen Whims would hear a good deal of sober sense, then; at least on one side: but I shall not ask her: for Mr. Thurnall and I have our deep secrets together."

So spoke the Major, in the simple wish to exalt Tom in a quarter where he hoped to get him practice; and his "secret" was a mere jest, unnecessary, perhaps, as he thought afterwards, to pass off Tom's want of orthodoxy.

"I was a babbler then," said he to himself the next moment; "how much better to have simply held my tongue!"

"Ah; yes; I know men have their secrets, as well as women," said Valencia, for the mere love of saying something: but as she looked at Vavasour, she saw an expression in his face which she had never seen before. What was it?—All that one can picture for oneself branded into the countenance of a man unable to repress the least emotion, who had worked himself into the belief that Thurnall had betrayed his secret.

"My dear Mr. Vavasour," cried Campbell, of course unable to guess the truth, and supposing vaguely that he was "ill;" "I am sure that—that the sun has overpowered you" (the only possible thing he could think of). "Lie down on the sofa a minute" (Vavasour was actually reeling with rage and terror), "and I will run up to Thurnall's for salvolatile."

Elsley, who thought him the most consummate of hypocrites, cast on him a look which he intended to have been withering, and rushed out of the room, leaving the two staring at each other.

Valencia was half inclined to laugh, knowing Elsley's petulance and vanity: but the impossibility of guessing a cause kept her quiet.

Major Campbell stood for full five minutes; not as one astounded, but as one in deep and anxious thought.

"What can be the matter, mon Saint Père?" asked she at last, to break the silence.

"That there are more whims in the world than yours, dear Queen Whims; and I fear darker ones. Let us walk up together after this man. I have offended him."

"Nonsense! I dare say he wanted to get home to write poetry, as you did not praise what he had written. I know his vanity and flightiness."

"You do?" asked he quickly, in a painful tone. "However, I have offended him, I can see; and deeply. I must go up, and make things right, for the sake of—for everybody's

"Then do not ask me anything. Lucia loves him intensely, and let that be enough for us."

The Major saw the truth of the last sentence no more than Valencia herself did; for Valencia would have been glad enough to pour out to him, with every exaggeration, her sister's woes and wrongs, real and fancied, had not the sense of her own folly with Vavasour kept her silent and conscience-stricken.

Valencia remarked the Major's pained look as they walked up the street.

"You dear conscientious Saint Père, why will you fret yourself about this foolish matter? He will have forgotten it all in an hour; I know him well enough."

Major Campbell was not the sort of person to admire Elsley the more for throwing away capriciously such deep passion as he had seen him show, any more than for showing the same.

"He must be of a very volatile temperament."

"Oh, all geniuses are."

"I have no respect for genius, Miss St. Just; I do not even acknowledge its existence when there is no strength and steadiness of character. If any one pretends to be more than a man, he must begin by proving himself a man at all. Genius? Give me common sense and common decency! Does he give Mrs. Vavasour, pray, the benefit of any of these pretty flights of genius?"

Valencia was frightened. She had never heard her Saint Père speak so severely and sarcastically; and she feared that if he knew the truth, he would be terribly angry. She had never seen him angry; but she knew well enough that that passion, when it rose in him in a righteous cause, would be very awful to see; and she was one of those women who always grow angry when they are frightened. So she was angry at his calling her Miss St. Just; she was angry because she chose to think he was talking at her; though she reasonably might have guessed it, seeing that he had scolded her a hundred times for want of steadiness of character. She was more angry than all, because she knew that her own vanity had caused—at least disagreement—between Lucia and Elsley. All which (combined with her natural wish not to confess an unpleasant truth about her sister) justified her, of course, in answering,—

"Miss St. Just does not intrude into the secrets of her sister's married life; and if she did, she would not repeat them."

Major Campbell sighed, and walked on a few moments in silence, then,—

"Pardon, Miss St. Just; I asked a rude question, and I am sorry for it."

"Pardon you, my dear Saint Père?" cried she, almost catch-

ing at his hand. "Never! I must either believe you infallible, or hate you eternally. It is I that was naughty; I always am: but you will forgive Queen Whims?"

"Who could help it?" said the Major, in a sad, sweet tone. "But here is the postman. May I open my letters?"

"You may do as you like, now you have forgiven me. Why, what is it, mon Saint Père?"

A sudden shock of horror had passed over the Major's face, as he read his letter: but it had soon subsided into stately calm.

"A gallant officer, whom we and all the world knew well, is dead of cholera, at his post, where a man should die. . . . And, my dear Miss St. Just, we are going to the Crimea."

"We?—you?"

"Yes. The expedition will really sail, I find."

"But not you?"

"I shall offer my services. My leave of absence will, in any case, end on the first of September; and even if it did not, my health is quite enough restored to enable me to walk up to a cannon's mouth."

"Ah, mon Saint Père, what words are these?"

"The words of an old soldier, Queen Whims, who has been so long at his trade that he has got to take a strange pleasure in it."

"In killing?"

"No; only in the chance of ——. But I will not cast an unnecessary shadow over your bright soul. There will be shadows enough over it soon, without my help."

"What do you mean?"

"That you, and thousands more as delicate, if not as fair as you, will see, ere long, what the realities of human life are; and in a way of which you have never dreamed."

And he murmured, half to himself, the words of the prophet, —"'Thou saidst, I shall sit as a lady for ever: but these two things shall come upon thee in one day, widowhood and the loss of children. They shall even come upon thee,'—No! not in their fulness! There are noble elements beneath the crust, which will come out all the purer from the fire; and we shall have heroes and heroines rising up among us as of old, sincere and earnest, ready to face their work, and to do it, and to call all things by their right names once more; and Queen Whims herself will become what Queen Whims might be!"

Valencia was awed, as well she might have been; for there was a very deep sadness about Campbell's voice.

"You think there will be def—— disasters?" said she, at last.

"How can I tell? That we are what we always were, I

doubt not. Scoutbush will fight as merrily as I. But we owe the penalty of many sins, and we shall pay it."

It would be as unfair, perhaps, as easy, to make Major Campbell a prophet after the fact, by attributing to him any distinct expectation of those mistakes which have been but too notorious since. Much of the sadness in his tone may have been due to his habitual melancholy; his strong belief that the world was, deeply diseased, and that some terrible purgation would surely come, when it was needed. But it is difficult, again, to conceive that those errors were altogether unforeseen by many an officer of Campbell's experience and thoughtfulness.

"We will talk no more of it just now." And they walked up to Penalva Court, seriously enough.

"Well, Scoutbush, any letters from town?" said the Major.

"Yes."

"You have heard what has happened at D—— Barracks?"

"Yes."

"You had better take care then, that the like of it does not happen here."

"Here?"

"Yes. I'll tell you all presently. Have you heard from head-quarters?"

"Yes; all right," said Scoutbush, who did not like to let out the truth before Valencia.

Campbell saw it, and signed to him to speak out.

"All right?" asked Valencia. "Then you are not going?"

"Ay, but I am! Orders to join my regiment by the first of October, and to be shot as soon afterwards as is fitting for the honour of my country. So, Miss Val, you must be quick in making good friends with the heir-at-law; or else you won't get your bills paid any more."

"Oh, dear, dear!" And Valencia began to cry bitterly. It was her first real sorrow.

Strangely enough, Major Campbell, instead of trying to comfort her, took Scoutbush out with him, and left her alone with her tears. He could not rest till he had opened the whole cholera question.

Scoutbush was honestly shocked. Who would have dreamed it? No one had ever told him that the cholera had really been there before. What could he do? Send for Thurnall?

Tom was sent for; and Scoutbush found, to his horror, that what little he could have ever done ought to have been done three months ago, with Lord Minchampstead's improvements at Pentremochyn.

The little man walked up and down, and wrung his hands. He cursed Tordrew for not telling him the truth; he cursed

himself for letting the cottages go out of his power; he cursed A, B, and C, for taking the said cottages off his hands; he cursed up, he cursed down, he cursed all around, things which ought to have been cursed, and things which really ought not—for half of the worst sanatory sinners, in this blessed age of ignorance, yclept of progress and science, (how our grandchildren will laugh at the epithets!) are utterly unconscious and guiltless ones.

But cursing leaves him, as it leaves other men, very much where he had started.

To do him justice, he was in one thing a true nobleman, for he was above all pride; as are most men of rank, who know what their own rank means. It is only the upstart, unaccustomed to his new eminence, who stands on his dignity, and "asserts his power."

So Scoutbush begged humbly of Thurnall only to tell him what he could do.

"You might use your moral influence, my lord."

"Moral influence?" in a tone which implied naïvely enough, "I'd better get a little morals myself before I talk of using the same."

"Your position in the parish—"

"My good Sir!" quoth Scoutbush in his shrewd way; "do you not know yourself what these fine fellows who were ready yesterday to kiss the dust off my feet would say, if I asked leave to touch a single hair of their rights?—'Tell you what, my lord; we pays you your rent, and you takes it. You mind your business, and we'll mind our'n.' You forget that times are changed since my seventeenth progenitor was lord of life and limb over man and maid in Aberalva."

"And since your seventeenth progenitor took the trouble to live at Penalva Court," said Campbell, "instead of throwing away what little moral influence he had by going into the Guards, and spending his time between Rotten Row and Cowes."

"Hardly fair, Major Campbell!" quoth Tom; "you forget that in the old times, if the Lord of Aberalva was responsible for his people, he had also by law the power of making them obey him."

"The long and the short of it is, then," said Scoutbush, a little tartly, "that I can do nothing."

"You can put to-rights the cottages which are still in your hands, my lord. For the rest, my only remaining hope lies in the last person whom one would usually depute on such an errand."

"Who is that?"

"The schoolmistress."

"The who?" asked Scoutbush.

"The schoolmistress; at whose house Major Campbell lodges."

And Tom told them, succinctly, enough to justify his strange assertion.

"If you doubt me, my lord, I advise you to ask Mr. Headley. He is no friend of hers; being a high churchman, while she is a little inclined to be schismatic; but an enemy's opinion will be all the more honest."

"She must be a wonderful woman," said Scoutbush; "I should like to see her."

"And I too," said Campbell. "I passed a lovely girl on the stairs last night, and thought no more of it. Lovely girls are common enough in West Country ports."

"We'll go and see her," quoth his lordship.

Meanwhile, Aberalva pier was astonished by a strange phenomenon. A boat from the yacht landed at the pier-head, not only Claude Mellot, whose beard was an object of wonder to the fishermen, but a tall three-legged box and a little black tent; which, being set upon the pier, became the scene of various mysterious operations, carried on by Claude and a sailor lad.

"I say!" quoth one of the fishing elders, after long suspicious silence; "I say, lads, this won't do. We can't have no outlandish foreigners taking observations here!"

And then dropped out one wild suspicion after another.

"Maybe he's surveying for a railroad?"

"Maybe he's from the Trinity House, going to make a new harbour; or maybe a light-house. And then we'd better not meddle wi' him."

"I'll tell you what he be. He's that here government chap as the Doctor said he'd bring down to set our drains right."

"If he goes meddling with our drains, and knocking of our back-yards about, he'll find himself over quay before he's done."

"Steady! steady! He come with my loord, mind."

"He might a' taken in his loordship, and be a Roossian spy to the bottom of him after all. They mak' munselves up into all manner of disguisements, specially beards. I've seed the Roossians with their beards many a time."

"Maybe 'tis witchcraft. Look to mun, putting mun's head under that black bag now! He'm after no good, I'll warrant. If they be'nt works of darkness, what be?"

"Leastwise he'm no right to go spying here on our quay, and never ax with your leave, or by your leave. I'll just goo mak' mun out."

And Claude who had just retreated into his tent, had the pleasure of finding the curtain suddenly withdrawn, and as a

flood of light rushed in, spoiling his daguerreotype plate, hearing a voice as of a sleepy bear—

"Ax your pardon, Sir; but what be you arter here?"

"Murder! shut the screen!" But it was too late; and Claude came out, while the eldest-born of Anak stood sternly inquiring,—

"I say, what be you arter here, mak' so boold?"

"Taking sun-pictures, my good sir; and you have spoilt one for me."

"Sun-picturs, saith a?" in a very incredulous tone.

"Daguerreotypes of the place for Lord Scoutbush."

"Oh!—if it's his lordship's wish, of course! Only things is very well as they are, and needs no mending, thank God. Only, ax pardon, Sir. You see, we don't generally allow no interfering on our pier without lave, Sir; the pier being ourn, we pays for the repairing. So, if his lordship intends making of alterations, he'd better to have spoken to us first."

"Alterations?" said Claude, laughing; "the place is far too pretty to need any improvement."

"Glad you think so, Sir! But whatever be you arter here?"

"Taking views! I'm a painter, an artist! I'll take your portrait, if you like!" said Claude, laughing more and more.

"Bless my heart, what vules we be! 'Tis a paainter gentleman, lads!" roared he.

"What on earth did you take me for? A Russian spy?"

The elder shook his head; grinned solemnly; and peace was concluded. "We'm old-fashioned folks here, you see, Sir; and don't like no new-fangled meddlecomes. You'll excuse us; you'm very welcome to do what you like, and glad to see you here." And the old fellow made a stately bow, and moved away.

"No, no! you must stay and have your portrait taken; you'll make a fine picture."

"Hum; might ha', they used to say, thirty years agone; I'm over old now. Still, my old woman might like it. Make so bold, Sir, but what's your charge?"

"I charge nothing. Five minutes' talk with an honest man will pay me."

"Hum: if you'd a let me pay you, Sir, well and good; but I maunt take up your time for nought; that's not fair."

However, Claude prevailed, and in ten minutes he had all the sailors on the quay round him; and one after another came forward blushing and grinning to be "taken off." Soon the children gathered round, and when Valencia and Major Campbell came on the pier, they found Claude in the midst of a ring of little dark-haired angels; while a dozen honest fellows

grinned when their own visages appeared, and chaffed each other about the sweethearts who were to keep them while they were out at sea. And in the midst little Claude laughed and joked, and told good stories, and gave himself up, the simple, the sunny-hearted fellow, to the pleasure of pleasing, till he earned from one and all the character of "the pleasantest-spokenest gentleman that was ever into the town."

"Here's her ladyship! make room for her ladyship!" But Claude held up a warning hand. He had just arranged a master piece,—half-a-dozen of the prettiest children, sitting beneath a broken boat, on spars, sails, blocks, lobster-pots, and what not, arranged in picturesque confusion; while the black-bearded sea-kings round were promising them rock and bullseyes, if they would only sit still like "gude maids."

But at Valencia's coming the children all looked round, and jumped up and curtsied, and then were afraid to sit down again.

"You have spoilt my group, Miss St. Just, and you must mend it!"

Valencia caught the humour, regrouped them all forthwith; and then placed herself in front of them by Claude's side.

"Now, be good children! Look straight at me, and listen!" And lifting up her finger, she began to sing the first song of which she could think, "The Landing of the Pilgrim Fathers."

She had no need to bid the children look at her and listen; for not only they, but every face upon the pier was fixed upon her; breathless, spell-bound, at once by her magnificent beauty and her magnificent voice, as up rose, leaping into the clear summer air, and rolling away over the still blue sea, that glorious melody which has now become the national anthem to the nobler half of the New World. Honour to woman, and honour to old England, that from Felicia Hemans came the song which will last, perhaps, when modern Europe shall have shared the fate of ancient Rome and Greece!

Valencia's singing was the reflex of her own character; and therefore, perhaps, all the more fitted to the song, the place, and the audience. It was no modest cooing voice, tender, suggestive, trembling with suppressed emotion, such as, even though narrow in compass, and dull in quality, will touch the deepest fibres of the heart, and, as delicate scents will sometimes do, wake up long-forgotten dreams, which seem memories of some antenatal life.

It was clear, rich, massive, of extraordinary compass, and yet full of all the graceful ease, the audacious frolic, of perfect physical health, and strength, and beauty; had there been a trace of effort in it, it might have been accused of "bravura:" but there was no need of effort where nature had bestowed

already an all but perfect organ, and all that was left for science was to teach not power, but control. Above all, it was a voice which you trusted; after the first three notes you felt that that perfect ear, that perfect throat, could never, even by the thousandth part of a note, fall short of melody; and you gave your soul up to it, and cast yourself upon it, to bear you up and away, like a fairy steed, whither it would, down into the abysses of sadness, and up to the highest heaven of joy; as did those wild and rough, and yet tender-hearted and imaginative men that day, while every face spoke new delight, and hung upon those glorious notes,—

> "As one who drinks from a charmed cup
> Of sparkling, and foaming, and murmuring wine"—

and not one of them, had he had the gift of words, but might have said with the poet:—

> "I have no life, Constantia, now but thee,
> While, like the world-surrounding air, thy song
> Flows on, and fills all things with melody.
> Now is thy voice tempest swift and strong,
> On which, like one in a trance upborne,
> Secure o'er rocks and waves I sweep,
> Rejoicing like a cloud of morn.
> Now 'tis the breath of summer night,
> Which, when the starry waters sleep
> Round western isles, with incense-blossoms bright,
> Lingering, suspends my soul in its voluptuous flight."

At last it ceased: and all men drew their breaths once more; while a low murmur of admiration ran through the crowd, too well-bred to applaud openly, as they longed to do.

"Did you ever hear the like of that, Gentleman Jan?"

"Or see? I used to say no one could hold a candle to our Grace but she—she looked like a born queen all the time!"

"Well, she belongs to us, too, so we've a right to be proud of her. Why, here's our Grace all the while!"

True enough; Grace had been standing among the crowd all the while, rapt, like them, her eyes fixed on Valencia, and full, too, of tears. They had been called up first by the melody itself, and then, by a chain of thought peculiar to Grace, by the faces round her.

"Ah! if Grace had been here!" cried one, "we'd have had her dra'ed off in the midst of the children."

"Ah! that would ha' been as nat'ral as life!"

"Silence, you!" says Gentleman Jan, who generally feels a mission to teach the rest of the quay good manners, "'Tis the gentleman's pleasure to settle who he'll dra' off, and no' wer'n"

To which abnormal possessive pronoun, Claude rejoined,—

"Not a bit! whatever you like. I could not have a better figure for the centre. I'll begin again."

"Oh, do come and sit among the children, Grace!" says Valencia.

"No, thank your ladyship."

Valencia began urging her; and many a voice round, old as well as young, backed the entreaty.

"Excuse me, my lady," and she slipped into the crowd; but as she went she spoke low, but clear enough to be heard by all: "No: it will be time enough to flatter me, and ask for my picture, when you do what I tell you—what God tells you!"

"What's that, then, Grace dear?"

"You know! I've asked you to save your own lives from cholera, and you have not the common sense to do it. Let me go home and pray for you!"

There was an awkward silence among the men, till some fellow said,—

"She'm gone mad after that doctor, I think, with his muck-hunting notions."

And Grace went home, to await the hour of afternoon school.

"What a face!" said Mellot.

"Is it not? Come and see her in her school, when the children go in at two o'clock. Ah! there are Scoutbush and St. Père."

"We are going to the school, my lord. Don't you think that, as patron of things in general here, it would look well if you walked in, and signified your full approbation of what you know nothing about?"

"So much so, that I was just on my way there with Campbell. But I must just speak to that lime-burning fellow. He wants a new lease of the kiln, and I suppose he must have it. At least, here he comes, running at me open-mouthed, and as dry as his own waistband. It makes one thirsty to look at him. I'll catch you up in five minutes!"

So the three went off to the school.

* * * * *

Grace was telling, in her own sweet way, that charming story of the Three Trouts, which, by the bye, has been lately pirated (as many things are) by a religious author, whose book differs sufficiently from the liberal and wholesome morality of the true author of the tale.

"What a beautiful story, Grace!" said Valencia. "You will surpass Hans Anderssen some day."

Grace blushed, and was silent a moment.

"It is not my own, my lady."

"Not your own? I should have thought that no one but you and Anderssen could have made such an ending to it."

Grace gave her one of those beseeching, half-reproachful looks, with which she always answered praise; and then,—"Would you like to hear the children repeat a hymn, my lady?"

"No. I want to know where that story came from."

Grace blushed, and stammered.

"I know where," said Campbell. "You need not be ashamed of having read the book, Miss Harvey. I doubt not that you took all the good from it, and none of the harm, if harm there be."

Grace looked at him; at once surprised and relieved.

"It was a foolish romance-book, Sir, as you seem to know. It was the only one which I ever read, except Hans Anderssen's,—which are not romances, after all. But the beginning was so full of God's truth, Sir,—romance though it was,—and gave me such precious new light about educating children, that I was led on unawares. I hope I was not wrong."

"This schoolroom proves that you were not," said Campbell. "'To the pure, all things are pure.'"

"What is this mysterious book? I must know!" said Valencia.

"A very noble romance, which I made Mellot read once, containing the ideal education of an English nobleman, in the middle of the last century."

"The Fool of Quality?" said Mellot. "Of course! I thought I had heard the story before. What a well-written book it is, too, in spite of all extravagance and prolixity. And how wonderfully ahead of his generation the man who wrote it, in politics as well as in religion!"

"I must read it," said Valencia. "You must lend it me, Saint Père."

"Not yet, I think."

"Why?" whispered she, pouting. "I suppose I am not as pure as Grace Harvey?"

"She has the children to educate, who are in daily contact with coarse sins, of which you know nothing—of which she cannot help knowing. It was written in an age when the morals of our class (more shame to us) were on the same level with the morals of her class now. Let it alone. I often have fancied I should edit a corrected edition of it. When I do, you shall read that."

"Now, Miss Harvey," said Mellot, who had never taken his eyes off her face, "I want to turn schoolmaster, and give your children a drawing lesson. Get your slates, all of you"

And taking possession of the black board and a piece of chalk, Claude began sketching them imps and angels, dogs and horses, till the school rang with shrieks of delight.

"Now," said he, wiping the board, "I'll draw something, and you shall copy it."

And, without taking off his hand, he drew a single line; and a profile head sprang up, as if by magic, under his firm, unerring touch.

"Somebody!" "A lady!" "No, 'taint; 'tis schoolmistress!"

"You can't copy that; I'll draw you another face." And he sketched a full face on the board.

"That's my lady." "No, it's schoolmistress again!" "No, it's not!"

"Not quite sure, my dears?" said Claude, half to himself. "Then here!" and wiping the board once more, he drew a three-quarters face, which elicited a shout of approbation.

"That's schoolmistress, her very self!"

"Then you cannot do anything better than try and draw it. I'll show you how." And going over the lines again, one by one, the crafty Claude pretended to be giving a drawing lesson, while he was really studying every feature of his model.

"If you please, my lady," whispered Grace to Valencia; "I wish the gentleman would not."

"Why not?"

"Oh, Madam, I do not judge any one else: but why should this poor perishing flesh be put into a picture? We wear it but for a little while, and are blessed when we are rid of its burden. Why wish to keep a copy of what we long to be delivered from?"

"It will please the children, Grace," said Valencia, puzzled. "See how they are all trying to copy it, from love of you."

"Who am I? I want them to do things from love of God. No, Madam, I was pained (and no offence to you) when I was asked to have my likeness taken on the quay. There's no sin in it, of course: but let those who are going away to sea, and have friends at home, have their pictures taken: not one who wishes to leave behind her no likeness of her own, only Christ's likeness in these children; and to paint Him to other people, not to be painted herself. Do ask him to rub it out, my lady!"

"Why, Grace, we were all just wishing to have a likeness of you. Every one has their picture taken for a remembrance."

"The saints and martyrs never had theirs, as far as I ever heard, and yet they are not forgotten yet. I know it is the way of great people like you. I saw your picture once, in a book Miss Heale had; and did not wonder, when I saw it, that people

wished to remember such a face as yours: and since I have seen you, I wonder still less."

"My picture? where?"

"In a book—'The Book of Beauty,' I believe they called it."

"My dear Grace," said Valencia, laughing and blushing, "if you ever looked in your glass, you must know that you are quite as worthy of a place in 'The Book of Beauty' as I am."

Grace shook her head with a serious smile. "Every one in their place, Madam. I cannot help knowing that God has given me a gift: but why, I cannot tell. Certainly not for the same purpose as He gave it to you for,—a simple country girl like me. If He have any use for it, He will use it, as He does all His creatures, without my help. At all events it will not last long; a few years more, perhaps a few months, and it will be food for worms; and then people will care as little about my looks as I care now. I wish, my lady, you would stop the gentleman!"

"Mr. Mellot, draw the children something simpler, please;—a dog or a cat." And she gave Claude a look which he obeyed.

Valencia felt in a more solemn mood than usual as she walked home that day.

"Well," said Claude, "I have here every line and shade, and she cannot escape me. I'll go on board and paint her right off from memory, while it is fresh. Why, here come Scoutbush and the Major."

"Miss Harvey," said Scoutbush, trying, as he said to Campbell, "to look as grand as a sheep-dog among a pack of fox-hounds, and very thankful all the while he had no tail to be bitten off"—"Miss Harvey, I—we—have heard a great deal in praise of your school; and so I thought I should like to come and see it."

"Would your lordship like to examine the children?" says Grace, curtseying to the ground.

"No—thanks—that is—I have no doubt you teach them all that's right, and we are exceedingly gratified with the way in which you conduct the school.—I say, Val," cried Scoutbush, who could support the part of patron no longer, "what pretty little ducks they are, I wish I had a dozen of them! Come you here!" and down he sat on a bench, and gathered a group round him.

"Now, are you all good children? I'm sure you look so!" said he, looking round into the bright pure faces, fresh from heaven, and feeling himself the nearer heaven as he did so. "Ah! I see Mr. Mellot's been drawing you pictures. He's a clever man, a wonderful man, isn't he? I can't draw you pictures, nor tell you stories, like your schoolmistress. What shall I do?"

"Sing to them Fred!" said Valencia.

And he began warbling a funny song, with a child on each knee, and his arms round three or four more, while the little faces looked up into his, half awe-struck at the presence of a live lord, half longing to laugh, but not sure whether it would be right.

Valencia and Campbell stood close together, exchanging looks.

"Dear fellow!" whispered she, "so simple and good when he is himself! And he must go to that dreadful war!"

"Never mind. Perhaps by this very act he is earning permission to come back again, a wiser and a more useful man."

"How then?"

"Is he not making friends with angels who always behold our Father's face? At least he is showing capabilities of good, which God gave; and which therefore God will never waste."

"Now, shall I sing you another song?"

"Oh yes, please!" rose from a dozen little mouths.

"You must not be troublesome to his lordship," says Grace.

"Oh no, I like it. I'll sing them one more song, and then—I want to speak to you, Miss Harvey."

Grace curtsied, blushed, and shook all over. What could Lord Scoutbush want to say to her?

That indeed was not very easy to discover at first; for Scoutbush felt so strongly the oddity of taking a pretty young woman into his counsel on a question of sanitary reform, that he felt mightily inclined to laugh, and began beating about the bush in a sufficiently confused fashion.

"Well, Miss Harvey, I am exceedingly pleased with—with what I have seen of the school—that is, what my sister tells, and the clergyman—"

"The clergyman?" thought Grace, surprised, as she well might be, at what was entirely an impromptu invention of his lordship's.

"And—and—there is ten pounds toward the school, and—and I, I will give an annual subscription the same amount."

"Mr. Headley receives the subscriptions, my lord," said Grace, drawing back from the proffered note.

"Of course," quoth Scoutbush, trusting again to an impromptu: "but this is for yourself—a small mark of our sense of your—your usefulness."

If any one has expected that Grace is about to conduct herself, during this interview, in any wise like a prophetess, tragedy queen, or other exalted personage; to stand upon her native independence, and scorning the bounty of an aristocrat, to read the said aristocrat a lecture on his duties and responsibilities, as

landlord of Aberalva town; then will that person be altogether disappointed. It would have looked very well, doubtless: but it would have been equally untrue to Grace's womanhood, and to her notions of Christianity. Whether all men were or were not equal in the sight of Heaven, was a notion which had never crossed her mind. She knew that they would all be equal in heaven, and that was enough for her. Meanwhile, she found lords and ladies on earth, and seeing no open sin in the fact of their being richer and more powerful than she was, she supposed that God had put them where they were; and she accepted them simply as facts of His kingdom. Of course they had their duties, as every one has: but what they were she did not know, or care to know. To their own master they stood or fell; her business was with her own duties, and with her own class, whose good and evil she understood by practical experience. So when a live lord made his appearance in her school, she looked at him with vague wonder and admiration, as a being out of some other planet, for whom she had no gauge or measure: she only believed that he had vast powers of doing good unknown to her; and was delighted by seeing him condescend to play with her children. The truth may be degrading, but it must be told. People, of course, who know the hollowness of the world, and the vanity of human wealth and honour, and are accustomed to live with lords and ladies, see through all that, just as clearly as any American republican does; and care no more about walking down Pall-Mall with the Marquis of Carabas, who can get them a place or a living, than with Mr. Two-shoes, who can only borrow ten pounds of them: but Grace was a poor simple West country girl; and as such we must excuse her, if, curtseying to the very ground, with tears of gratitude in her eyes, she took the ten-pound note, saying to herself, "Thank the Good Lord! This will just pay mother's account at the mill."

Likewise we must excuse her if she trembled a little, being a young woman—though being also a lady, she lost no jot of self-possession—when his lordship went on in as important a tone as he could—

"And—and I hear, Miss Harvey, that you have a great influence over these children's parents."

"I am afraid some one has misinformed your lordship," said Grace, in a low voice.

"Ah!" quoth Southbush, in a tone meant to be re-assuring; "it is quite proper in you to say so. What eyes she has! and what hair! and what hands, too!" (This was, of course, spoken mentally.) "But we know better; and we want you to speak to them, whenever you can, about keeping their houses clean, and all that, in case the cholera should come." And Scoutbush

stopped. It was a quaint errand enough; and besides, as he told Mellot frankly, "I could think of nothing but those wonderful eyes of hers, and how like they were to La Signora's."

Grace had been looking at the ground all the while. Now she threw upon him one of her sudden, startled looks, and answered slowly, as her eyes dropped again:

"I have, my lord; but they will not listen to me."

"Won't listen to you? Then to whom will they listen?"

"To God, when He speaks Himself," said she, still looking on the ground. Scoutbush winced uneasily. He was not accustomed to solemn words, spoken so solemnly.

"Do you hear this, Campbell? Miss Harvey has been talking to these people already, and they won't hear her."

"Miss Harvey, I dare say, is not astonished at that. It is the usual fate of those who try to put a little common sense into their fellow-men."

"Well, and I shall, at all events, go off and give them my mind on the matter; though I suppose (with a glance at Grace) I can't expect to be heard where Miss Harvey has not been."

"Oh, my lord," cried Grace, "if you would but speak—" And there she stopped; for was it her place to tell him his duty? No doubt he had wiser people than her to counsel him.

But the moment the party left the school, Grace dropped into her chair; her head fell on the table, and she burst into an agony of weeping, which brought the whole school round her.

"Oh, my darlings! my darlings!" cried she at last, looking up, and clasping them to her by twos and threes; "Is there no way of saving you? No way? Then we must make the more haste to be good, and be all ready when Jesus comes to take us." And shaking off her passion with one strong effort, she began teaching those children as she had never taught them before, with a voice, a look, as of Stephen himself when he saw the heavens opened.

For that burst of weeping was the one single overflow of long pent passion, disappointment, and shame.

She had tried, indeed. Ever since Tom's conversation and Frank's sermon had poured in a flood of new light on the meaning of epidemics, and bodily misery, and death itself, she had been working as only she could work; exhorting, explaining, coaxing, warning, entreating with tears, offering to perform with her own hands the most sickening offices; to become, if no one else would, the common scavenger of the town. There was no depth to which, in her noble enthusiasm, she would not have gone down. And behold, it had been utterly in vain! Ah! the bitter disappointment of finding her influence fail her utterly, the first time that it was required for a great practical work!

They would let her talk to them about their souls, then !—They would even amend a few sins here and there, of which they had been all along as well aware as she. But to be convinced of a new sin ; to have their laziness, pride, covetousness, touched ; that, she found, was what they would not bear ; and where she had expected, if not thanks, at least a fair hearing, she had been met with peevishness, ridicule, even anger and insult.

Her mother had turned against her. "Why would she go getting a bad name from every one, and driving away customers?" The preachers, who were (as is too common in West country villages) narrow, ignorant, and somewhat unscrupulous men, turned against her. They had considered the cholera, if it was to come, as so much spiritual capital for themselves ; an occasion which they could "improve" into a sensation, perhaps a "revival ;" and to explain it upon mere physical causes was to rob them of their harvest. Coarse viragos went even further still, and dared to ask her "whether it was the curate or the doctor she was setting her cap at ; for she never had anything in her mouth now but what they had said?" And those words went through her heart like a sword. Was she disinterested? Was not love for Thurnall, the wish to please him, mingling with all her earnestness? And again, was not self-love mingling with it? and mingling, too, with the disappointment, even indignation, which she felt at having failed? Ah—what hitherto hidden spots of self-conceit, vanity, pharisaic pride, that bitter trial laid bare, or seemed to lay, till she learned to thank her unseen Guide even for it !

Perhaps she had more reason to be thankful for her humiliation than she could suspect, with her narrow knowledge of the world. Perhaps that sudden downfall of her fancied queenship was needed, to shut her out, once and for all, from that downward path of spiritual intoxication, followed by spiritual knavery, which, as has been hinted, was but too easy for her.

But meanwhile the whole thing was but a fresh misery. To bear the burden of Cassandra day and night, seeing in fancy—which yet was truth—the black shadow of death hanging over that doomed place ; to dream of whom it might sweep off ;—perhaps, worst of all, her mother, unconfessed and impenitent !

Too dreadful ! And dreadful, too, the private troubles which were thickening fast ; and which seemed, instead of drawing her mother to her side, to estrange her more and more, for some mysterious reason. Her mother was heavily in debt. This ten pounds of Lord Scoutbush's would certainly clear off the miller's bill. Her scanty quarter's salary, which was just due, would clear off a little more. But there was a long standing account of the wholesale grocer's for five-and-twenty pounds, for which Mrs.

Harvey had given a two months' bill. That bill would become due early in September: and how to meet it, neither mother nor daughter knew; it lay like a black plague-spot on the future, only surpassed in horror by the cholera itself.

It might have been three or four days after, that Claude, lounging after breakfast on deck, was hailed from a dingy, which contained Captain Willis and Gentleman Jan.

"Might we take the liberty of coming aboard to speak with your honour?"

"By all means!" and up the side they came; their faces evidently big with some great purpose, and each desirous that the other should begin.

"You speak, Captain," says Jan, "you'm oldest;" and then he began himself. "If you please, Sir, we'm come on a sort of deputation—Why don't you tell the gentleman, Captain?"

Willis seemed either doubtful of the success of his deputation, or not over desirous thereof; for, after trying to put John Beer forward as spokesman, he began:—

"I'm sorry to trouble you, Sir, but these young men will have it so—and no shame to them—on a matter which I think will come to nothing. But the truth is, they have heard that you are a great painter, and they have taken it into their heads to ask you to paint a picture for them."

"Not to ask you a favour, Sir, mind!" interrupted Jan; "we'd scorn to be so forward; we'll subscribe and pay for it, in course, any price in reason. There's forty and more promised already."

"You must tell me, first, what the picture is to be about," said Claude, puzzled and amused.

"Why didn't you tell the gentleman, Captain?"

"Because I think it is no use; and I told them all so from the first. The truth is, Sir, they want a picture of my——of our schoolmistress, to hang up in the school or somewhere—"

"That's it, dra'ed out all natural, in paints, and her bonnet, and her shawl, and all, just like life; we was a going to ax you to do one of they garrytypes; but she would have'n noo price; besides tan't cheerful looking they sort, with your leave; too much blackamoor wise, you see, and over thick about the nozzes, most times, to my liking; so we'll pay you and welcome, all you ask."

"Too much blackamoor wise, indeed!" said Claude, amused. "And how much do you think I should ask?"

No answer.

"We'll settle that presently. Come down into the cabin with me."

"Why, Sir, we couldn't make so bold. His lordship—"

"Oh, his lordship's on shore, and I am skipper for the time; and if not, he'd be delighted to see two good seamen here. So come along."

And down they went.

"Bowie, bring these gentlemen some sherry!" cried Claude, turning over his portfolio. "Now then, my worthy friends, is that the sort of thing you want?"

And he spread on the table a water-colour sketch of Grace.

The two worthies gazed in silent delight, and then looked at each other, and then at Claude, and then at the picture.

"Why, Sir," said Willis; "I couldn't have believed it! You've got the very smile of her, and the sadness of her too, as if you'd known her a hundred year!"

"'Tis beautiful!" sighed Jan, half to himself. Poor fellow, he had cherished, perhaps, hopes of winning Grace after all.

"Well, will that suit you?"

"Why, Sir, make so bold:—but what we thought on was to have her drawn from head to foot, and a child standing by her like, holding to her hand, for a token as she was schoolmistress; and the pier behind, may be, to signify as she was our maid, and belonged to Aberalva."

"A capital thought! Upon my word, you're men of taste here in the West; but what do you think I should charge for such a picture as that?"

"Name your price, Sir," said Jan, who was in high good humour at Claude's approbation.

"Two hundred guineas?"

Jan gave a long whistle.

"I told you so, Captain Beer," said Willis, "or ever we got into the boat."

"Now," said Claude, laughing, "I've two prices, one's two hundred, and the other is just nothing; and if you won't agree to the one, you must take the other."

"But we wants to pay, we'd take it an honour to pay, if we could afford it."

"Then wait till next Christmas."

"Christmas?"

"My good friend, pictures are not painted in a day. Next Christmas, if I live, I'll send you what you shall not be ashamed of, or she either, and do you club your money and put it into handsome gold frame."

"But, Sir," said Willis, "this will give you a sight of trouble, and all for our fancy."

"I like it, and I like you! You're fine fellows, who know a noble creature when God sends her to you; and I should be

ashamed to ask a farthing of your money. There, no more words!"

"Well, you are a gentleman, Sir!" said Gentleman Jan.

"And so are you," said Claude. "Now I'll show you some more sketches."

"I should like to know, Sir," asked Willis, "how you got at that likeness. She would not hear of the thing, and that's why I had no liking to come troubling you about nothing."

Claude told them, and Jan laughed heartily, while Willis said,—

"Do you know, Sir, that's a relief to my mind. There is no sin in being drawn, of course; but I didn't like to think my maid had changed her mind, when once she'd made it up."

So the deputation retired in high glee, after Willis had entreated Claude and Beer to keep the thing a secret from Grace.

It befell that Claude, knowing no reason why he should not tell Frank Headley, told him the whole story, as a proof of the chivalry of his parishioners, in which he would take delight.

Frank smiled, but said little; his opinion of Grace was altering fast. A circumstance which occurred a few days after altered it still more.

Scoutbush had gone forth, as he threatened, and exploded in every direction, with such effect as was to be supposed. Everybody promised his lordship to do everything. But when his lordship's back was turned, everybody did just nothing. They knew very well that he could not make them do anything; and what was more, in some of the very worst cases, the evil was past remedy now, and better left alone. For the drought went on pitiless. A copper sun, a sea of glass, a brown easterly blight, day after day, while Thurnall looked grimly aloft and mystified the sailors with—

"Fine weather for the Flying Dutchman, this!"

"Coffins sail fastest in a calm."

"You'd best all out to the quay-head, and whistle for a wind: it would be an ill one that would blow nobody good just now!"

But the wind came not, nor the rain; and the cholera crept nearer and nearer: while the hearts of all in Aberalva were hardened, and out of very spite against the agitators, they did less than they would have done otherwise. Even the inhabitants of the half-a-dozen cottages, which Scoutbush, finding that they were in his own hands, whitewashed by main force, filled the town with lamentations over his lordship's tyranny. True—their pigstyes were either under their front windows; or within two feet of the wall: but to pull down a poor man's pig-stye!—they might ever so well be Rooshian slaves!—and all the town

was on their side; for pigs were the normal inhabitants of Aberalva back-yards.

Tardrew's wrath, of course, knew no bounds; and meeting Thurnall standing at Willis's door, with Frank and Mellot, he fell upon him open-mouthed.

"Well, Sir! I've a crow to pick with you."

"Pick away!" quoth Tom.

"What business have you meddling between his lordship and me?"

"That is my concern," quoth Tom, who evidently was not disinclined to quarrel. "I am not here to give an account to you of what I choose to do."

"I'll tell you what, Sir; ever since you've been in this parish you've been meddling, you and Mr. Headley too,—I'll say it to your faces,—I'll speak the truth to any man, gentle or simple; and that ain't enough for you, but you must come over that poor half-crazed girl, to set her plaguing honest people, with telling 'em they'll all be dead in a month, till nobody can eat their suppers in peace: and that again ain't enough for you, but you must go to my lord with your—"

"Hold hard!" quoth Tom. "Don't start two hares at once. Let's hear that about Miss Harvey again!"

"Miss Harvey? Why, you should know better than I."

"Let's hear what you know."

"Why, ever since that night Trebooze caught you and her together—"

"Stop!" said Tom, "that's a lie!"

"Everybody says so."

"Then everybody lies, that's all; and you may say I said so, and take care you don't say it again yourself. But what ever since that night?"

"Why, I suppose you come over the poor thing some how, as you seem minded to do over every one as you can. But she's been running up and down the town ever since, preaching to 'em about windilation, and drains, and smells, and cholera, and it's being a judgment of the Lord against dirt, till she's frightened all the women so, that many's the man as has had to forbid her his house.—But you know that as well as I."

"I never heard a word of it before: but now I have, I'll give you my opinion on it. That she is a noble, sensible girl, and that you are all a set of fools who are not worthy of her; and that the greatest fool of the whole is you, Mr. Tardrew. And when the cholera comes, it will serve you exactly right if you are the first man carried off by it. Now, Sir, you have given me your mind, and I have given you mine, and I do not wish to hear anything more of you. Good morning!"

"You hold your head mighty high, to be sure, since you've had the run of his lordship's yacht."

"If you are impertinent, Sir, you will repent it. I shall take care to inform his lordship of this conversation."

"My dear Thurnall," said Headley, as Tardrew withdrew, muttering curses, "the old fellow is certainly right on one point."

"What then?"

"That you have wonderfully changed your tone. Who was to eat any amount of dirt, if he could but save his influence thereby?"

"I have altered my plans. I shan't stay here long; I shall just see this cholera over, and then vanish."

"No?"

"Yes. I cannot sit here quietly, listening to the war-news. It makes me mad to be up and doing. I must eastward-ho, and see if trumps will not turn up for me at last. Why, I know the whole country, half-a-dozen of the languages,—oh, if I could get some secret-service work! Go I must. At worst I can turn my hand to doctoring Bashi-bazouks."

"My dear Tom, when will you settle down like other men?" cries Claude.

"I would now, if there was an opening at Whitbury, and low as life would be, I'd face it for my father's sake. But here I cannot stay."

Both Claude and Headley saw that Tom had reasons which he did not choose to reveal. However, Claude was taken into his confidence that very afternoon.

"I shall make a fool of myself with that schoolmistress. I have been near enough to it a dozen times already; and this magnificent conduct of hers about the cholera has given the finishing stroke to my brains. If I stay on here, I shall marry her: I know I shall! and I won't!—I'd go to-morrow, if it were not that I'm bound, for my own credit, to see the cholera safe into the town, and out again."

Tom did not hint a word of the lost money, or of the month's delay which Grace had asked of him. The month was drawing fast to a close now, however: but no sign of the belt. Still, Tom had honour enough in him to be silent on the point, even to Claude.

"By the bye, have you heard from the wanderers this week?"

"I heard from Sabina this morning. Marie is very poorly, I fear. They have been at Kissingen, bathing; and are going to Bertrich: somebody has recommended the baths there."

"Bertrich! Where's Bertrich?"

"The most delicious little nest of a place, half way up the Moselle, among the volcano craters."

"Don't know it. Have they found that Yankee?"

"No."

"Why, I thought Sabina had a whole detective force of pets and protégés, from Boulogne to Rome."

"Well, she has at least heard of him at Baden; and then again at Stuttgard: but he has escaped them as yet."

"And poor Marie is breaking her heart all the while? I'll tell you what, Claude, it will be well for him if he escapes me as well as them."

"What do you mean?"

"I certainly shan't go to the East without shaking hands once more with Marie and Sabina; and if in so doing I pass that fellow, it's a pity if I don't have a snap shot at him."

"Tom! Tom! I had hoped your duelling days were over."

"They will be over, when one can get the law to punish such puppies; but not till then. Hang the fellow! What business had he with her at all, if he didn't intend to marry her?"

"I tell you, as I told you before, it is she who will not marry him."

"And yet she's breaking her heart for him. I can see it all plain enough, Claude. She has found him out only too late. I know him—luxurious, selfish, blazé; would give a thousand dollars to-morrow, I believe, like the old Roman, for a new pleasure: and then amuses himself with her till he breaks her heart! Of course she won't marry him: because she knows that if he found out her Quadroon blood—ah, that's it! I'll lay my life he has found it out already, and that is why he has bolted!"

Claude had no answer to give. That talk at the Exhibition made it only too probable.

"You think so yourself, I see! Very well. You know that whatever I have been to others, that girl has nothing against me."

"Nothing against you? Why, she owes you honour, life, everything."

"Never mind that. Only when I take a fancy to begin, I'll carry it through. I took to that girl, for poor Wyse's sake; and I'll behave by her to the last as he would wish; and he who insults her, insults me. I won't go out of my way to find Stangrave: but if I do, I'll have it out!"

"Then you will certainly fight. My dearest Tom, do look into your own heart, and see whether you have not a grain or two of spite against him left. I assure you you judge him too harshly."

"Hum—that must take its chance. At least, if we fight, we fight fairly and equally. He is a brave man—I will do him that

justice—and a cool one; and used to be a sweet shot. So he has just as good a chance of shooting me, if I am in the wrong, as I have of shooting him, if he is."

"But your father?"

"I know. That is very disagreeable; and all the more so because I am going to insure my life—a pretty premium they will make me pay!—and if I'm killed in a duel, it will be forfeited. However, the only answer to that is, that either I shan't fight, or if I do, I shan't be killed. You know, I don't believe in being killed, Claude."

"Tom! Tom! The same as ever!" said Claude, sadly.

"Well, old man, and what else would you have me? Nobody could ever alter me, you know; and why should I alter myself? Here I am, after all, alive and jolly; and there is old daddy, as comfortable as he ever can be on earth: and so it will be to the end of the chapter. There! let's talk of something else."

CHAPTER XVI.

COME AT LAST.

Now, as if in all things Tom Thurnall and John Briggs were fated to take opposite sides, Campbell lost ground with Elsley as fast as he gained it with Thurnall. Elsley had never forgiven himself for his passion that first morning. He had shown Campbell his weak side, and feared and disliked him accordingly. Beside, what might not Thurnall have told Campbell about him? And what use might not the Major make of his secret? Besides, Elsley's dread and suspicion increased rapidly when he discovered that Campbell was one of those men who live on terms of peculiar intimacy with many women; whether for his own good or not, still for the good of the women concerned. For only by honest purity, and moral courage superior to that of the many, is that dangerous post earned; and women will listen to the man who will tell them the truth, however sternly; and will bow, as before a guardian angel, to the strong insight of him whom they have once learned to trust. But it is a dangerous office, after all, for layman as well as for priest, that of father-confessor. The experience of centuries has shown that they must needs exist, wherever fathers neglect their daughters, husbands their wives; wherever the average of the women cannot respect the average of the men. But the experience of centuries should likewise have taught men, that the said father-confessors are no objects of envy; that their temptations to become spiritual coxcombs (the worst species of all coxcombs), if not intriguers, bullies, and

worse, are so extreme, that the soul which is proof against them must be either very great, or very small indeed. Whether Campbell was altogether proof, will be seen hereafter. But one day Elsley found out that such was Campbell's influence, and did not love him the more for the discovery.

They were walking round the garden after dinner; Scoutbush was licking his foolish lips over some common-place tale of scandal.

"I tell you, my dear fellow, she's booked; and Mellot knows it as well as I. He saw her that night at Lady A.'s."

"We saw the third act of the comi-tragedy. The fourth is playing out now. We shall see the fifth before the winter."

"Non sine sanguine!" said the Major.

"Serve the wretched stick right, at least," said Scoutbush. "What right had he to marry such a pretty woman?"

"What right had they to marry her up to him?" said Claude.

"I don't blame poor January. I suppose none of us, gentlemen, would have refused such a pretty toy, if we could have afforded it as he could."

"Whom do you blame then?" asked Elsley.

"Fathers and mothers who prate hypocritically about keeping their daughters' minds pure; and then abuse a girl's ignorance, in order to sell her to ruin. Let them keep her mind pure, in heaven's name; but let them consider themselves all the more bound in honour to use on her behalf the experience in which she must not share."

"Well," drawled Scoutbush, "I don't complain of her bolting; she's a very sweet creature, and always was: but, as Longreach says,—and a very witty fellow he is, though you laugh at him, —'If she'd kept to us, I shouldn't have minded: but as Guardsmen, we must throw her over. It's an insult to the whole Guards, my dear fellow, after refusing two of us, to marry an attorney, and after all to bolt with a plunger.'"

What bolting with a plunger might signify, Elsley knew not: but ere he could ask, the Major rejoined, in an abstracted voice—

"God help us all! And this is the girl I recollect, two years ago, singing there in Cavendish Square, as innocent as a nestling thrush!"

"Poor child!" said Mellot, "sold at first—perhaps sold again now. The plunger has bills out, and she has ready money. I know her settlements."

"She shan't do it," said the Major quietly: "I'll write to her to-night."

Elsley looked at him keenly. "You think, then, Sir, that you can, by simply writing, stop this intrigue?"

The Major did not answer. He was deep in thought.

"I shouldn't wonder if he did," said Scoutbush; "two to one on his baulking the plunger!"

"She is at Lord ———'s now, at those silly private theatricals. Is he there?"

"No," said Mellot; "he tried hard for an invitation—stooped to work me and Sabina. I believe she told him that she would sooner see him in the Morgue than help him; and he is gone to the moors now, I believe."

"There is time then: I will write to her to-night;" and Campbell took up his hat and went home to do it.

"Ah," said Scoutbush, taking his cigar meditatively from his mouth, "I wonder how he does it! It's a gift, I always say, a wonderful gift! Before he has been a week in a house, he'll have the confidence of every woman in it,—and 'gad, he does it by saying the rudest things!—and the confidence of all the youngsters the week after."

"A somewhat dangerous gift," said Elsley, drily.

"Ah, yes; he might play tricks if he chose: but there's the wonder, that he don't. I'd answer for him with my own sister. I do every day of my life—for I believe he knows how many pins she puts into her dress—and yet there he is. As I said once in the mess-room—there was a youngster there who took on himself to be witty, and talked about the still sow supping the milk—the snob! You recollect him, Mellot? the attorney's son from Brompton, who sold out;—we shaved his mustachios, put a bear in his bed, and sent him home to his ma—And he said that Major Campbell might be very pious, and all that: but he'd warrant—they were the fellow's own words,—that he took his lark on the sly, like other men—the snob! so I told him, I was no better than the rest, and no more I am; but if any man dared to say that the Major was not as honest as his own sister, I was his man at fifteen paces. And so I am, Claude!"

All which did not increase Elsley's love to the Major, conscious as he was that Lucia's confidence was a thing which he had not wholly; and which it would be very dangerous to him for any other man to have at all.

Into the drawing-room they went. Frank Headley had been asked up to tea; and he stood at the piano, listening to Valencia's singing.

As they came in, the maid came in also. "Mr. Thurnall wished to speak to Major Campbell."

Campbell went out, and returned in two minutes somewhat hurriedly.

"Mr. Thurnall wishes Lord Scoutbush to be informed at

once, and I think it is better that you should all know it—that—it is a painful surprise:—but there is a man ill in the street, whose symptoms he does not like, he says."

"Cholera?" said Elsley.

"Call him in," said Scoutbush.

"He had rather not come in, he says."

"What! is it infectious?"

"Certainly not, if it be cholera, but—"

"He don't wish to frighten people, quite right:" (with a half glance at Elsley;) "but is it cholera, honestly?"

"I fear so."

"Oh, my children!" said poor Mrs. Vavasour.

"Will five pounds help the poor fellow!" said Scoutbush.

"How far off is it?" asked Elsley.

"Unpleasantly near. I was going to advise you to move at once."

"You hear what they are saying?" asked Valencia of Frank.

"Yes, I hear it," said Frank, in a quiet meaning tone.

Valencia thought that he was half pleased with the news. Then she thought him afraid; for he did not stir.

"You will go instantly, of course?"

"Of course I shall. Good-bye! Do not be afraid. It is not infectious."

"Afraid? And a soldier's sister?" said Valencia, with a toss of her beautiful head, by way of giving force to her somewhat weak logic.

Frank left the room instantly, and met Thurnall in the passage.

"Well, Headley, it's here before we sent for it, as bad luck usually is."

"I know. Let me go! Where is it? Whose house?" asked Frank in an excited tone.

"Humph!" said Thurnall, looking intently at him, "that is just what I shall not tell you."

"Not tell me?"

"No, you are too pale, Headley. Go back and get two or three glasses of wine, and then we will talk of it."

"What do you mean? I must go instantly! It is my duty,—my parishioner!"

"Look here, Headley! Are you and I to work together in this business, or are we not?"

"Why not, in heaven's name?"

"Then I want you, not for cure, but for prevention. You can do them no good when they have once got it. You may prevent dozens from having it in the next four-and-twenty hours, if you will be guided by me.'

"But my business is with their souls, Thurnall."

"Exactly;—to give them the consolations of religion, as they call it. You will give them to the people who have not taken it. You may bring them safe through it by simply keeping up their spirits; while if you waste your time on poor dying wretches—"

"Thurnall, you must not talk so! I will do all you ask: but my place is at the death-bed, as well as elsewhere. These perishing souls are in my care."

"And how do you know, pray, that they are perishing?" answered Tom, with something very like a sneer. "And if they were, do you honestly believe that any talk of yours can change in five minutes a character which has been forming for years, or prevent a man's going where he ought to go,—which, I suppose, is the place to which he deserves to go?"

"I do," said Frank, firmly.

"Well. It is a charitable and hopeful creed. My great dread was, lest you should kill the poor wretches before their time, by adding to the fear of cholera the fear of hell. I caught the Methodist parson at that work an hour ago, took him by the shoulders, and shot him out into the street. But, my dear Headley" (and Tom lowered his voice to a whisper), "wherever poor Tom Beer deserved to go to, he is gone to it already. He has been dead this twenty minutes."

"Tom Beer dead? One of the finest fellows in the town! And I never sent for?"

"Don't speak so loud, or they will hear you. I had no time to send for you; and if I had, I should not have sent, for he was past attending to you from the first. He brought it with him, I suppose, from C * * *. Had had warnings for a week, and neglected them. Now listen to me: that man was but two hours ill; as sharp a case as I ever saw, even in the West Indies. You must summon up all your good sense, and play the man for a fortnight; for it's coming on the poor souls like hell!" said Tom between his teeth, and stamped his foot upon the ground. Frank had never seen him show so much feeling; he fancied he could see tears glistening in his eyes.

"I will, so help me God!" said Frank.

Tom held out his hand, and grasped Frank's.

"I know you will. You're all right at heart. Only mind three things: don't frighten them; don't tire yourself; don't go about on an empty stomach; and then we can face the worst like men. And now go in, and say nothing to these people. If they take a panic, we shall have some of them down to-night as sure as fate. Go in, keep quiet, persuade them to bolt anywhere on earth by daylight to-morrow. Then go home, eat a good

supper, and come across to me; and if I'm out, I'll leave word where."

Frank went back again; he found Campbell, who had had his cue from Tom, urging immediate removal as strongly as he could, without declaring the extent of the danger. Valencia was for sending instantly for a fly to the nearest town, and going to stay at a watering-place some forty miles off. Elsley was willing enough at heart, but hesitated; he knew not, at the moment, poor fellow, where to find the money. His wife knew that she could borrow of Valencia; but she, too, was against the place. The cholera would be in the air for miles round. The journey in the hot sun would make the children sick and ill; and watering-place lodgings were such horrid holes, never ventilated, and full of smells—people caught fevers at them so often. Valencia was inclined to treat this as "mother's nonsense;" but Major Campbell said gravely, that Mrs. Vavasour was perfectly right as to fact, and her arguments full of sound reason; whereon Valencia said that "of course if Lucia thought it, Major Campbell would prove it; and there was no arguing with such Solons as he—"

Which Elsley heard, and ground his teeth. Whereon little Scoutbush cried joyfully,—

"I have it; why not go by sea? Take the yacht, and go! Where? Of course, I have it again. 'Pon my word I'm growing clever, Valencia, in spite of all your prophecies. Go up the Welsh coast. Nothing so healthy and airy as a sea-voyage: sea as smooth as a mill-pond, too, and likely to be. And then land, if you like, at Port Madoc, as I meant to do; and there are my rooms at Beddgelert lying empty. Engaged them a week ago, thinking I should be there by now; so you may as well keep them aired for me. Come, Valencia, pack up your millinery! Lucia, get the cradles ready, and we'll have them all on board by twelve. Capital plan, Vavasour, isn't it? and, by Jove, what stunning poetry you will write there under Snowdon!"

"But will you not want your rooms yourself, Lord Scoutbush?" said Elsley.

"My dear fellow, never mind me. I shall go across the country, I think, see an old friend, and get some otter-hunting. Don't think of me, till you're there, and then send the yacht back for me. She must be doing something, you know; and the men are only getting drunk every day here. Come—no arguing about it, or I shall turn you all out of doors into the lane, eh?"

And the little fellow laughed so good-naturedly, that Elsley could not help liking him: and feeling that he would be both a

fool, and cruel to his family, if he refused so good an offer, he gave in to the scheme, and went out to arrange matters: while Scoutbush went out into the hall with Campbell, and scrambled into his pea-jacket, to go off to the yacht that moment.

"You'll see to them, there's a good fellow," as they lighted their cigars at the door. "That Vavasour is greener than grass, you know, *tant pis* for my poor sister."

"I am not going."

"Not going?"

"Certainly not; so my rooms will be at their service; and you had much better escort them yourself. It will be much less disagreeable for Vavasour, who knows nothing of commanding sailors," or himself, thought the Major, "than finding himself master of your yacht in your absence, and you will get your fishing as you intended."

"But why are you going to stay?"

"Oh, I have not half done with the sea-beasts here. I found two new ones yesterday."

"Quaint old beetle-hunter you are, for a man who has fought in half-a-dozen battles!" and Scoutbush walked on silently for five minutes.

Suddenly he broke out—

"I cannot! By George, I cannot; and what's more, I won't!"

"What?"

"Run away. It will look so—so cowardly, and there's the truth of it, before those fine fellows down there: and just as I am come among them, too! The commander-in-chief to turn tail at the first shot! Though I can't be of any use, I know, and I should have liked a fortnight's fishing so," said he in a dolorous voice, "before going to be eaten up with flies at Varna—for this Crimean expedition is all moonshine."

"Don't be too sure of that," said Campbell. "We shall go; and some of us who go will never come back, Freddy. I know those Russians better than many, and I have been talking them over lately with Thurnall, who has been in their service."

"Has he been at Sevastopol?"

"No. Almost the only place on earth where he has not been: but from all he says, and from all I know, we are undervaluing our foes, as usual, and shall smart for it!"

"We'll lick them, never fear!"

"Yes; but not at the first round. Scoutbush, your life has been child's play as yet. You are going now to see life in earnest,—the sort of life which average people have been living, in every age and country, since Adam's fall; a life of sorrow and danger, tears and blood, mistake, confusion, and perplexity; and you will find it a very new sensation; and, at first, a very ugly

one. All the more reason for doing what good deeds you can before you go; for you may have no time left to do any on the other side of the sea."

Scoutbush was silent awhile.

"Well; I'm afraid of nothing, I hope: only I wish one could meet this cholera face to face, as one will those Russians, with a good sword in one's hand, and a good horse between one's knees; and have a chance of giving him what he brings, instead of being kicked off by the cowardly Rockite, no one knows how; and not even from behind a turf dyke, but out of the very clouds."

"So we all say, in every battle, Scoutbush. Who ever sees the man who sent the bullet through him? And yet we fight on. Do you not think the greatest terror, the only real terror, in any battle, is the chance shots which come from no one knows where, and hit no man can guess whom? If you go to the Crimea, as you will, you will feel what I felt at the Cape, and Cabul, and the Punjab, twenty times,—the fear of dying like a dog, one knew not how."

"And yet I'll fight, Campbell!"

"Of course you will, and take your chance. Do so now!"

"By Jove, Campbell—I always say it—you're the most sensible man I ever met; and, by Jove, the doctor comes the next. My sister shall have the yacht, and I'll go up to Penalva."

"You will do two good deeds at once, then," said the Major. "You will do what is right, and you will give heart to many a poor wretch here. Believe me, Scoutbush, you will never repent of this."

"By Jove, it always does one good to hear you talk in that way, Campbell! One feels—I don't know—so much of a man when one is with you; not that I shan't take uncommonly good care of myself, old fellow; that is but fair: but as for running away, as I said, why—why—why I can't, and so I won't!"

"By the bye," said the Major, "there is one thing which I have forgotten, and which they will never recollect. Is the yacht victualled—with fresh meat and green stuff, I mean?"

"Whew—w—"

"I will go back, borrow a lantern, and forage in the garden, like an old campaigner. I have cut a salad with my sword before now."

"And made it in your helmet, with macassar sauce?" And the two went their ways.

Meanwhile, before they had left the room, a notable conversation had been going on between Valencia and Headley.

Headley had re-entered the room so much paler than he went out, that everybody noticed his altered looks. Valencia chose to attribute them to fear.

"So! Are you returned from the sick man already, Mr. Headley?" asked she, in a marked tone.

"I have been forbidden by the doctor to go near him at present, Miss St. Just," said he quietly, but in a sort of under-voice, which hinted that he wished her to ask no more questions. A shade passed over her forehead, and she began chatting rather noisily to the rest of the party, till Elsley, her brother, and Campbell went out.

Valencia looked up at him, expecting him to go too. Mrs. Vavasour began bustling about the room, collecting little valuables, and looking over her shoulders at the now unwelcome guest. But Frank leaned back in a cosey arm-chair, and did not stir. His hands were clasped on his knees; he seemed lost in thought; very pale: but there was a firm set look about his lips which attracted Valencia's attention. Once he looked up in Valencia's face, and saw that she was looking at him. A flush came over his cheeks for a moment, and then he seemed as impassive as ever. What could he want there? How very gauche and rude of him; so unlike him, too! And she said, civilly enough, to him, "I fear, Mr. Headley, we must begin packing up now."

"I fear you must, indeed," answered he, as if starting from a dream. He spoke in a tone, and with a look, which made both the women start; for what they meant it was impossible to doubt.

"I fear you must. I have foreseen it a long time; and so, I fear (and he rose from his seat), must I, unless I mean to be very rude. You will at least take away with you the knowledge, that you have given to one person's existence, at least for a few weeks, pleasure more intense than he thought earth could hold."

"I trust that pretty compliment was meant for me," said Lucia, half playful, half reproving.

"I am sure that it ought not to have been meant for me," said Valencia, more downright than her sister. Both could see for whom it was meant, by the look of passionate worship which Frank fixed on a face which, after all, seemed made to be worshipped.

"I trust that neither of you," answered he, quietly, "think me impertinent enough to pretend to make love, as it is called, to Miss St. Just. I know who she is, and who I am. Gentleman as I am, and the descendant of gentlemen" (and Frank looked a little proud, as he spoke, and very handsome), "I see clearly enough the great gulf fixed between us; and I like it; for it enables me to say truth which I otherwise dare not have spoken; as a brother might say it to a sister, or a subject to a queen. Either analogy will do equally well, and equally ill."

Frank, without the least intending it, had taken up the very strongest military position. Let a man once make a woman understand, or fancy, that he knows that he is nothing to her; and confess boldly that there is a great gulf fixed between them, which he has no mind to bridge over: and then there is little that he may not see or do, for good or for evil.

And therefore it was that Lucia answered gently, "I am sure you are not well, Mr. Headley. The excitement of the night has been too much for you."

"Do I look excited, my dear Madam?" he answered quietly. "I assure you that I am as calm as a man must be who believes that he has but a few days to live, and trusts, too, that when he dies, he will be infinitely happier than he ever has been on earth, and lay down an office which he has never discharged otherwise than ill; which has been to him a constant source of shame and sorrow."

"Do not speak so!" said Valencia, with her Irish impetuous generosity; "you are unjust to yourself. We have watched you, felt for you, honoured you, even when we differed from you"—What more she would have said, I know not, but at that moment Elsley's peevish voice was heard calling over the stairs, "Lucia! Lucia!"

"Oh dear! He will wake the children!" cried Lucia, looking at her sister, as much as to say, "how can I leave you?"

"Run, run, my dear creature!" said Valencia, with a self-confident smile: and the two were left alone.

The moment that Mrs. Vavasour left the room, there vanished from Frank's face that intense look of admiration which had made even Valencia uneasy. He dropped his eyes, and his voice faltered as he spoke again. He acknowledged the change in their position, and Valencia saw that he did so, and liked him the better for it.

"I shall not repeat, Miss St. Just, now that we are alone, what I said just now of the pleasure which I have had during the last month. I am not poetical, or given to string metaphors together; and I could only go over the same dull words once more. But I could ask, if I were not asking too much, leave to prolong at least a shadow of that pleasure to the last moment. That I shall die shortly, and of this cholera, is with me a fixed idea, which nothing can remove. No, Madam—it is useless to combat it! But had I anything, by which to the last moment I could bring back to my fancy what has been its sunlight for so long; even if it were a scrap of the hem of your garment, aye, a grain of dust off your feet—God forgive me! He and His mercy ought to be enough to keep me up: but one's weakness may be excused for clinging to such slight floating straws of comfort."

Valencia paused, startled, and yet affected. How she had played with this deep pure heart! And yet, was it pure? Did he wish, by exciting her pity, to trick her into giving him what he might choose to consider a token of affection?

And she answered coldly enough—

"I should be sorry, after what you have just said, to chance hurting you by refusing. I put it to your own good feeling—have you not asked somewhat too much?"

"Certainly too much, Madam, in any common case," said he, quite unmoved. "Certainly too much, if I asked you for it, as I do not, as the token of an affection which I know well you do not, cannot feel. But—take my words as they stand—were you to—It would be returned if I die, in a few weeks; and returned still sooner if I live. And, Madam," said he lowering his voice, "I vow to you, before Him who sees us both, that, as far as I am concerned, no human being shall ever know of the fact."

Frank had at last touched the wrong chord.

"What, Mr. Headley? Can you think that I am to have secrets in common with you, or with any other man? No, Sir! If I granted your request, I should avow it as openly as I shall refuse it."

And she turned sharply toward the door.

Frank Headley was naturally a shy man: but extreme need sometimes bestows on shyness a miraculous readiness—(else why, in the long run, do the shy men win the best wives? which is a fact, and may be proved by statistics, at least as well as anything else can) so he quietly stepped to Valencia's side, and said in a low voice—

"You cannot avow the refusal half as proudly as I shall avow the request, if you will but wait till your sister's return. Both are unnecessary, I think: but it will only be an honour to me to confess, that, poor curate as I am—"

"Hush!" and Valencia walked quietly up to the table, and began turning over the leaves of a book, to gain time for her softened heart and puzzled brain.

In five minutes Frank was beside her again. The book was Tennyson's "Princess." She had wandered—who can tell why?—to that last exquisite scene, which all know; and as Valencia read, Frank quietly laid a finger on the book, and arrested her eyes at last—

> "If you be, what I think you, some sweet dream,
> * * * * * *
> Stoop down, and seem to kiss me ere I die!"

Valencia shut the book up hurriedly and angrily. A moment after she had made up her mind what to do, and with the

slightest gesture in the world, motioned Frank proudly and coldly to follow her back into the window. Had she been a country girl, she would have avoided the ugly matter; but she was a woman of the world enough to see that she must, for her own sake and his, talk it out reasonably.

"What do you mean, Mr. Headley? I must ask! You told me just now that you had no intention of making love to me."

"I told you the truth," said he, in his quiet impassive voice. "I fixed on these lines as a *pis aller;* and they have done all, and more than I wished, by bringing you back here for at least a moment."

"And do you suppose—you speak like a rational man, therefore, I must treat you as one—that I can grant your request?"

"Why not? It is an uncommon one. If I have guessed your character aright, you are able to do uncommon things. Had I thought you enslaved by etiquette, and by the fear of a world which you can make bow at your feet if you will, I should not have asked you. But,"—and here his voice took a tone of deepest earnestness—"grant it—only grant it, and you shall never repent it. Never, never, never will I cast one shadow over a light which has been so glorious, so life-giving; which I watched with delight, and yet lose without regret. Go your way, and God be with you! I go mine; grant me but a fortnight's happiness, and then, let what will come!"

He had conquered. The quiet earnestness of the voice, the child-like simplicity of the manner, of which every word conveyed the most delicate flattery—yet, she could see, without intending to flatter, without an after thought—all these had won the impulsive Irish nature. For all the dukes and marquises in Belgravia she would not have done it; for they would have meant more than they said, even when they spoke more clumsily: but for the plain country curate she hesitated, and asked herself, "What shall I give him?"

The rose from her bosom? No. That was too significant at once, and too common-place; besides, it might wither, and he find an excuse for not restoring it. It must be something valuable, stately, formal, which he must needs return. And she drew off a diamond hoop, and put it quietly into his hand.

"You promise to return it?"

"I promised long ago."

He took it, and lifted it—she thought that he was going to press it to his lips. Instead, he put it to his forehead, bowing forward, and moved it slightly. She saw that he made with it the sign of the Cross.

"I thank you," he said, with a look of quiet gratitude. "I

expected as much, when you came to understand my request. Again, thank you!" and he drew back humbly, and left her there alone; while her heart smote her bitterly for all the foolish encouragement which she had given to one so tender, and humble, and delicate and true.

And so did Frank Headley get what he wanted; by that plain earnest simplicity, which has more power (let worldlings pride themselves as they will on their knowledge of women) than all the cunning wiles of the most experienced rake; and only by aping which, after all, can the rake conquer. It was a strange thing for Valencia to do, no doubt: but the strange things which are done in the world (which are some millions daily) are just what keep the world alive.

CHAPTER XVII.

BAALZEBUB'S BANQUET.

THE next day there were three cholera cases: the day after there were thirteen.

He had come at last, Baalzebub, God of flies, and of what flies are bred from; to visit his self-blinded worshippers, and bestow on them his own Cross of the Legion of Dishonour. He had come suddenly, capriciously, sportively, as he sometimes comes; as he had come to Newcastle the summer before, while yet the rest of England was untouched. He had wandered all but harmless about the West country that summer; as if his maw had been full glutted five years before, when he sat for many a week upon the Dartmoor hills, amid the dull brown haze, and sun-burnt bents, and dried-up water courses of white dusty granite, looking far and wide over the plague-struck land, and listening to the dead-bell booming all day long in Tavistock churchyard. But he was come at last, with appetite more fierce than ever, and had darted aside to seize on Aberalva, and not to let it go till he had sucked his fill.

And all men moved about the streets slowly, fearfully; conscious of some awful unseen presence, which might spring on them from round every corner; some dreadful inevitable spell, which lay upon them like a nightmare weight; and walked to and fro warily, looking anxiously into each other's faces, not to ask, "How are you?" but "How am I?" "Do I look as if—?" and glanced up ever and anon restlessly, as if they expected to see, like the Greeks, in their tainted camp, by Troy, the pitiless Sun-god shooting his keen arrows down on beast and man.

All night long the curdled cloud lay low upon the hills, wrapping in its hot blanket the sweltering breathless town; and rolled off sullenly when the sun rose high, to let him pour down his glare, and quicken into evil life all evil things. For Baalzebub is a sunny fiend; and loves not storm and tempest, thunder, and lashing rains; but the broad bright sun, and broad blue sky, under which he can take his pastime merrily, and laugh at all the shame and agony below; and, as he did at his great banquet in New Orleans once, madden all hearts the more by the contrast between the pure heaven above and the foul hell below.

And up and down the town the foul fiend sported, now here now there; snapping daintily at unexpected victims, as if to make confusion worse confounded; to belie Thurnall's theories and prognostics, and harden the hearts of fools by fresh excuses for believing that he had nothing to do with drains and water; that he was "only"—such an only!—"the Visitation of God."

He has taken old Beer's second son; and now he clutches at the old man himself; then across the street to Gentleman Jan, his eldest: but he is driven out from both houses by chloride of lime and peat dust, and the colony of the Beers has peace awhile.

Alas! there are victims enough and to spare beside them, too ready for the sacrifice, and up the main street he goes unabashed, springing in at one door and at another, on either side of the street, but fondest of the western side, where the hill slopes steeply down to the house-backs.

He fleshes his teeth on every kind of prey. The drunken cobbler dies, of course: but spotless cleanliness and sobriety does not save the mother of seven children, who has been soaking her brick floor daily with water from a poisoned well, defiling where she meant to clean. Youth does not save the buxom lass, who has been filling herself, as girls will do, with unripe fruit: nor innocence the two fair children who were sailing their feather-boats yesterday in the quay-pools, as they have sailed them for three years past, and found no hurt: piety does not save the bed-ridden old dame, bed-ridden in the lean-to garret, who moans, "It is the Lord!" and dies. It is "the Lord" to her, though Baalzebub himself be the angel of release.

And yet all the while sots and fools escape where wise men fall; weakly women, living amid all wretchedness, nurse, unharmed, strong men who have breathed fresh air all day. Of one word of Scripture at least Baalzebub is mindful; for "one is taken and another left."

Still, there is a method in his seeming madness. His eye falls on a blind alley, running back from the main street, backed at

the upper end by a high wall of rock. There is a God-send for him—a devil's-send, rather, to speak plain truth: and in he dashes; and never leaves that court, let brave Tom wrestle with him as he may, till he has taken one from every house.

That court belonged to Treluddra, the old fish-jowder. He must do something. Thurnall attacks him; Major Campbell, Headley; the neighbours join in the cry; for there is no mistaking cause and effect there, and no one bears a great love to him; besides, terrified and conscience-stricken men are glad of a scapegoat; and some of those who were his stoutest backers in the vestry are now, in their terror, the loudest against him, ready to impute the whole cholera to him. Indeed, old Beer is ready to declare that it was Treluddra's fish-heaps which poisoned him and his: so, all but mobbed, the old sinner goes up—to set the houses to rights? No; to curse the whole lot for a set of pigs, and order them to clean the place out themselves, or he will turn them into the street. He is one of those base natures, whom fact only lashes into greater fury,—a Pharaoh whose heart the Lord himself can only harden; such men there are, and women, too, grown grey in lies, to reap at last the fruit of lies. But he carries back with him to his fish-heaps a little invisible somewhat which he did not bring; and ere nightfall he is dead hideously; he, his wife, his son:—and now the Beers are down again, and the whole neighbourhood of Treluddra's house is wild with disgusting agony.

Now the fiend is hovering round the fish-curing houses: but turns back, disgusted with the pure scent of the tan-yard, where not hides, but nets are barked; skips on board of a brig in the quay-pool; and a poor collier's 'prentice dies, and goes to his own place. What harm has he done? Is it his sin that, ill-fed and well-beaten daily, he has been left to sleep on board, just opposite the sewer's mouth, in a berth some four feet long by two feet high and broad?

Or is it that poor girl's sin who was just now in Heale's shop, talking to Miss Heale safe and sound, that she is carried back into it, in half-an-hour's time, fainting, shrieking? One must draw a veil over the too hideous details.

No, not her fault: but there, at least, the curse has not come without a cause. For she is Tardrew's daughter.

But whither have we got? How long has the cholera been in Aberalva? Five days, five minutes, or five years? How many suns have risen and set since Frank Headley put into his bosom Valencia's pledge?

It would be hard for him to tell; and hard for many more: for all the days have passed as in a fever dream. To cowards the time has seemed endless; and every moment, ere their term shall

come, an age of terror, of self-reproach, of superstitious prayers, and cries, which are not repentance. And to some cowards, too, the days have seemed but as a moment; for they have been drunk day and night.

Strange and hideous, yet true.

It has now become a mere common-place, the strange power which great crises, pestilences, famines, revolutions, invasions, have to call out in their highest power, for evil and for good alike, the passions and virtues of man; how, during their stay, the most desperate recklessness, the most ferocious crime, side by side with the most heroic and unexpected virtue, are followed generally by a collapse and a moral death, alike of virtue and of vice. We should explain this now-a-days, and not ill, by saying that these crises put the human mind into a state of exaltation: but the truest explanation, after all, lies in the old Bible belief, that in these times there goes abroad the unquenchable fire of God, literally kindling up all men's hearts to the highest activity, and showing, by the light of their own strange deeds, the inmost recesses of their spirits, till those spirits burn down again, self-consumed, while the chaff and stubble are left as ashes, not valueless after all, as manure for some future crop; and the pure gold, if gold there be, alone remains behind.

Even so it was in Aberalva during that fearful week. The drunkards drank more; the swearers swore more than ever; the unjust shopkeeper clutched more greedily than ever at the last few scraps of mean gain which remained for him this side the grave; the selfish wrapped themselves up more brutally than ever in selfishness; the shameless women mingled desperate debauchery with fits of frantic superstition; and all base souls cried out together, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!"

But many a brave man and many a weary woman possessed their souls in patience, and worked on, and found that as their day their strength should be. And to them the days seemed short indeed; for there was too much to be done in them for any note of time.

Headley and Campbell, Grace and old Willis, and last, but not least, Tom Thurnall,—these and three or four brave women, organized themselves into a right-gallant and well-disciplined band, and commenced at once a visitation from house to house, saving thereby, doubtless, many a life: but ere eight-and-forty hours were passed, the house visitation languished. It was as much as they could do to attend to the acute cases.

And little Scoutbush? He could not nurse, nor doctor: but what he could, he did. He bought, and fetched all that money could procure. He galloped over to the justices, and obtained such summary powers as he could; and then, like a true Irish

man, exceeded them recklessly, breaking into premises right and left, in an utterly burglarious fashion; he organized his fatigue-party, as he called them, of scavengers, and paid the cowardly clods five shillings a day each to work at removing all removable nuisances; he walked up and down the streets for hours, giving the sailors cigars from his own case, just to show them that he was not afraid, and therefore they need not be: and if it was somewhat his fault that the horse was stolen, he at least did his best after the event to shut the stable-door. The five real workers toiled on, meanwhile, in perfect harmony and implicit obedience to the all-knowing Tom, but with the most different inward feelings. Four of them seemed to forget death and danger; but each remembered them in his own fashion.

Major Campbell longed to die, and courted death. Frank believed that he should die, and was ready for death. Grace longed to die, but knew that she should not die till she had found Tom's belt, and was content to wait. Willis was of opinion that an "old man must die some day, and somehow,—as good one way as another;" and all his concern was to run about after his maid, seeing that she did not tire herself, and obeying all her orders with sailor-like precision and cleverness.

And Tom? He just thought nothing about death and danger at all. Always smiling, always cheerful, always busy, yet never in a hurry, he went up and down, seemingly ubiquitous. Sleep he got when he could, and food as often as he could; into the sea he leapt, morning and night, and came out fresher every time; the only person in the town who seemed to grow healthier, and actually happier, as the work went on.

"You really must be careful of yourself," said Campbell, at last. "You carry no charmed life."

"My dear Sir, I am the most cautious and selfish man in the town. I am living by rule; I have got—and what greater pleasure?—a good stand-up fight with an old enemy; and be sure I shall keep myself in condition for it. I have written off for help to the Board of Health, and I shall not be shoved against the ropes till the Government man comes down."

"And then?"

"I shall go to bed and sleep for a month. Never mind me; but mind yourself: and mind that curate; he's a noble brick;—if all parsons in England were like him, I'd—What's here now?"

Miss Heale came shrieking down the street.

"Oh, Mr. Thurnall! Miss Tardrew! Miss Tardrew!"

"Screaming will only make you ill, too, Miss. Where is Miss Tardrew?"

"In the surgery,—and my mother!"

"I expected this," said Tom. "The old man will go next."

He went into the surgery. The poor girl was in collapse already. Mrs. Heale was lying on the sofa, stricken. The old man hanging over her, brandy bottle in hand.

"Put away that trash!" cried Tom; "you've had too much already."

"Oh, Mr. Thurnall, she's dying, and I shall die too!"

"You! you were all right this morning."

"But I shall die; I know I shall, and go to hell!"

"You'll go where you ought; and if you give way to this miserable cowardice, you'll go soon enough. Walk out, Sir! Make yourself of some use, and forget your fear! Leave Mrs. Heale to me."

The wretched old man obeyed him, utterly cowed, and went out: but not to be of use: he had been hopelessly boozy from the first—half to fortify his body against infection, half to fortify his heart against conscience. Tom had never reproached him for his share in the public folly. Indeed, Tom had never reproached a single soul. Poor wretches who had insulted him had sent for him, with abject shrieks. "Oh, doctor, doctor, save me! Oh, forgive me! oh, if I'd minded what you said! Oh, don't think of what I said!" And Tom had answered cheerfully, "Tut-tut; never mind what might have been; let's feel your pulse."

But though Tom did not reproach Heale, Heale reproached himself. He had just conscience enough left to feel the whole weight of his abused responsibility, exaggerated and defiled by superstitious horror; and maudlin tipsy, he wandered about the street, moaning that he had murdered his wife, and all the town, and asking pardon of every one he met; till seeing one of the meeting-houses open, he staggered in, in the vain hope of comfort which he knew he did not deserve.

In half-an-hour Tom was down the street again to Headley's. "Where is Miss Harvey?"

"At the Beers'."

"She must go up to Heale's instantly. The mother will die. Those cases of panic seldom recover. And Miss Heale may very likely follow her. She has shrieked and sobbed herself into it, poor fool! and Grace must go to her at once; she may bring her to common sense and courage, and that is the only chance."

Grace went, and literally talked and prayed Miss Heale into life again.

"You are an angel," said Tom to her that very evening, when he found the girl past danger.

"Mr. Thurnall!" said Grace, in a tone of sad and most meaning reproof.

"But you are! And these owls are not worthy of you."

"This is no time for such language, Sir! After all, what am

I doing more than you?" And Grace went upstairs again, with a cold hard countenance which belied utterly the heart within.

That was the critical night of all. The disease seemed to have done its worst in the likeliest spots: but cases of panic increased all the afternoon; and the gross number was greater than ever.

Tom did not delay inquiring into the cause: and he discovered it. Headley, coming out the next morning, after two hours' fitful sleep, met him at the gate: his usual business-like trot was exchanged for a fierce and hurried stamp. When he saw Frank, he stopped short, and burst out into a story which was hardly intelligible, so interlarded was it with oaths.

"For Heaven's sake! Thurnall, calm yourself, and do not swear so frightfully; it is so unlike you! What can have upset you thus?"

"Why should I not curse and swear in the street," gasped he, "while every fellow who calls himself a preacher is allowed to do it in the pulpit with impunity! Fine him five shillings for every curse, as you might if people had courage and common sense, and then complain of me! I am a fool, I know, though. But I cannot stand it! To have all my work undone by a brutal ignorant fanatic!—It is too much! Here, if you will believe it, are those preaching fellows getting up a revival, or some such invention, just to make money out of the cholera! They have got down a great gun from the county town. Twice a-day they are preaching at them, telling them that it is all God's wrath against their sins; that it is impious to interfere, and that I am fighting against God, and the end of the world is coming, and they and the devil only know what. If I meet one of them, I'll wring his neck, and be hanged for it! Oh, you parsons! you parsons!" and Tom ground his teeth with rage.

"Is it possible? How did you find this out?"

"Mrs. Heale had been in, listening to their howling, just before she was taken. Heale went in when I turned him out of doors; came home raving mad, and is all but blue now. Three cases of women have I had this morning, all frightened into cholera, by their own confession, by last night's tom-foolery.—Came home howling, fainted, and were taken before morning. One is dead, the other two will die. You must stop it, or I shall have half-a-dozen more to-night! Go into the meeting, and curse the cur to his face!"

"I cannot," cried Frank, with a gesture of despair, "I cannot!"

"Ah, your cloth forbids you, I suppose, to enter the non conformist opposition shop."

"You are unjust, Thurnall! What are such rules at a moment like this? I'd break them, and the bishop would hold me guiltless. But I cannot speak to these people. I have no eloquence

—no readiness—they do not trust me—would not believe me—God help me!" and Frank covered his face with his hands, and burst into tears.

"Not that, for Heaven's sake!" said Tom, "or we shall have you blue next, my good fellow. I'd go myself, but they'd not hear me, for certain; I am no Christian, I suppose: at least, I can't talk their slang:—but I know who can! We'll send Campbell!"

Frank hailed the suggestion with rapture, and away they went: but they had an hour's good search from sufferer to sufferer before they found the Major.

He heard them quietly. A severe gloom settled over his face. "I will go," said he.

At six o'clock that evening, the meeting-house was filling with terrified women, and half-curious, half-sneering, men; and among them the tall figure of Major Campbell, in his undress uniform (which he had put on, wisely, to give a certain dignity to his mission), stalked in, and took his seat in the back benches.

The sermon was what he expected. There is no need to transcribe it. Such discourses may be heard often enough in churches as well as chapels. The preacher's object seemed to be—for some purpose or other which we have no right to judge—to excite in his hearers the utmost intensity of selfish fear, by language which certainly, as Tom had said, came under the law against profane cursing and swearing. He described the next world in language which seemed a strange jumble of Virgil's Æneid, the Koran, the dreams of those rabbis who crucified our Lord, and of those mediæval inquisitors who tried to convert sinners (and on their own ground, neither illogically nor over-harshly) by making this world for a few hours as like as possible to what, so they held, God was going to make the world to come for ever.

At last he stopped suddenly, when he saw that the animal excitement was at the very highest; and called on all who felt "convinced" to come forward and confess their sins.

In another minute there would have been (as there have been ere now) four or five young girls raving and tossing upon the floor, in mad terror and excitement; or, possibly, half the congregation might have rushed out (as a congregation has rushed out ere now) headed by the preacher himself, and ran headlong down to the quay pool, with shrieks and shouts, declaring that they had cast the devil out of Betsey Pennington, and were hunting him into the sea: but Campbell saw that the madness must be stopped at once; and rising, he thundered, in a voice which brought all to their senses in a moment—

"Stop! I, too, have a sermon to preach to you; I trust I am

a Christian man, and that not of last year's making, or the year before. Follow me outside, if you be rational beings, and let me tell you the truth—God's truth! Men!" he said, with an emphasis on the word, "you, at least, will give me a fair hearing, and you too, modest married women! Leave that fellow with the shameless hussies who like to go into fits at his feet."

The appeal was not in vain. The soberer majority followed him out; the insane minority soon followed, in the mere hope of fresh excitement; while the preacher was fain to come also, to guard his flock from the wolf. Campbell sprang upon a large block of stone, and taking off his cap, opened his mouth, and spake unto them.

* * * * *

Readers will doubtless desire to hear what Major Campbell said: but they will be disappointed; and perhaps it is better for them that they should be. Let each of them, if they think it worth while, write for themselves a discourse fitting for a Christian man, who loved and honoured his Bible too much to find in a few scattered texts, all misinterpreted, and some mistranslated, excuses for denying fact, reason, common justice, the voice of God in his own moral sense, and the whole remainder of the Bible from beginning to end.

Whatsoever words he spoke they came home to those wild hearts with power. And when he paused, and looked intently into the faces of his auditory, to see what effect he was producing, a murmur of assent and admiration rose from the crowd, which had now swelled to half the population of the town. And no wonder; no wonder that, as the men were enchained by the matter, so were the women by the manner. The grand head, like a grey granite peak against the clear blue sky; the tall figure, with all its martial stateliness and ease; the gesture of his long arm, so graceful, and yet so self-restrained; the tones of his voice which poured from beneath that proud moustache, now tender as a girl's, now ringing like a trumpet over roof and sea. There were old men there, old beyond the years of man, who said they had never seen nor heard the like: but it must be like what their fathers had told them of, when John Wesley, on the cliffs of St. Ives, out-thundered the thunder of the gale. To Grace he seemed one of the old Scotch Covenanters of whom she had read, risen from the dead to preach there from his rock beneath the great temple of God's air, a wider and a juster creed than theirs. Frank drew Thurnall's arm through his, and whispered, "I shall thank you for this to my dying day:" but Thurnall held down his head. He seemed deeply moved. At last, half to himself,—

"Humph! I believe that between this man and that girl, you will make a Christian even of me some day!"

But the lull was only for a moment. For Major Campbell, looking round, discerned among the crowd the preacher, whispering and scowling amid a knot of women; and a sudden fit of righteous wrath came over him.

"Stand out there, Sir, you Preacher, and look me in the face, if you can!" thundered he. "We are here on common ground as free men, beneath God's heaven and God's eye. Stand out, Sir! and answer me if you can; or be for ever silent!"

Half in unconscious obedience to the soldier-like word of command, half in jealous rage, the preacher stepped forward, gasping for breath,—

"Don't listen to him! He is a messenger of Satan, sent to damn you—a lying prophet! Let the Lord judge between me and him! Stop your ears—a messenger of Satan—a Jesuit in disguise!"

"You lie, and you know that you lie!" answered Campbell, twirling slowly his long moustache, as he always did when choking down indignation. "But you have called on the Lord to judge; so do I. Listen to me, Sir! Dare you, in the presence of God, answer for the words which you have spoken this day?"

A strange smile came over the preacher's face.

"I read my title clear, Sir, to mansions in the skies. Well for you if you could do the same."

Was it only the setting sun, or was it some inner light from the depths of that great spirit, which shone out in all his countenance, and filled his eyes with awful inspiration, as he spoke, in a voice calm and sweet, sad and regretful, and yet terrible from the slow distinctness of every vowel and consonant?

"Mansions in the skies? You need not wait till then, Sir, for the presence of God. Now, here, you and I are before God's judgment-seat. Now, here, I call on you to answer to Him for the innocent lives which you have endangered and destroyed, for the innocent souls to whom you have slandered their heavenly Father by your devil's doctrines this day! You have said it. Let the Lord judge between you and me. He knows best how to make His judgment manifest."

He bowed his head awhile, as if overcome by the awful words which he had uttered, almost in spite of himself, and then stepped slowly down from the stone, and passed through the crowd, which reverently made way for him; while many voices cried, "Thank you, Sir! Thank you!" and old Captain Willis, stepping forward, held out his hand to him, a quiet pride in his grey eye.

"You will not refuse an old fighting man's thanks, Sir? This has been like Elijah's day with Baal's priests on Carmel."

Campbell shook his hand in silence: but turned suddenly, for another and a coarser voice caught his ear. It was Jones, the Lieutenant's.

"And now, my lads, take the Methodist Parson, neck and heels, and heave him into the quay pool, to think over his summons!"

Campbell went back instantly. "No, my dear Sir, let me entreat you for my sake. What has passed has been too terrible to me already; if it has done any good, do not let us break it by spoiling the law."

"I believe you're right, Sir: but my blood is up, and no wonder. Why, where is the preacher?"

He had stood quite still for several minutes after Campbell's adjuration. He had, often, perhaps, himself hurled forth such words in the excitement of preaching; but never before had he heard them pronounced in spirit and in truth. And as he stood, Thurnall, who had his doctor's eye on him, saw him turn paler and more pale. Suddenly he clenched his teeth, and stooped slightly forwards for a moment, drawing his breath. Thurnall walked quickly and steadily up to him.

Gentleman Jan and two other riotous fellows had already laid hold of him, more with the intention of frightening, than of really ducking him.

"Don't! don't!" cried he, looking round with eyes wild—but not with terror.

"Hands off, my good lads," said Tom quietly. "This is my business now, not yours, I can tell you."

And passing the preacher's arm through his own, with a serious face, Tom led him off into the house at the back of the chapel.

In two hours more he was blue; in four he was a corpse. The judgment, as usual, had needed no miracle to enforce it.

Tom went to Campbell that night, and apprised him of the fact. "Those words of yours went through him, Sir, like a Minié bullet. I was afraid of what would happen when I heard them."

"So was I, the moment after they were spoken. But, Sir, I felt a power upon me,—you may think it a fancy,—that there was no resisting."

"I dare impute no fancies, when I hear such truth and reason as you spoke upon that stone, Sir."

"Then you do not blame me?" asked Campbell, with a subdued, almost deprecatory voice, such as Thurnall had never heard in him before.

"The man deserved to die, and he died, Sir. It is well that there are some means left on earth of punishing offenders whom the law cannot touch."

"It is an awful responsibility."

"Not more awful than killing a man in battle, which we both have done, Sir, and yet have felt no sting of conscience."

"An awful responsibility still. Yet what else is life made up of, from morn to night, but of deeds which may earn heaven or hell? . . . Well, as he did to others, so was it done to him. God forgive him! At least, our cause will be soon tried and judged: there is little fear of my not meeting him again—soon enough." And Campbell, with a sad smile, lay back in his chair and was silent.

"My dear Sir," said Tom, "allow me to remind you, after this excitement comes a collapse; and that is not to be trifled with just now. Medicine I dare not give you. Food I must."

Campbell shook his head.

"You must go now, my dear fellow. It is now half-past ten, and I will be at Pennington's at one o'clock, to see how he goes on; so you need not go there. And, meanwhile, I must take a little medicine."

"Major, you are not going to doctor yourself?" cried Tom.

"There is a certain medicine called prayer, Mr. Thurnall—an old specific for the heart-ache, as you will find one day—which I have been neglecting much of late, and which I must return to in earnest before midnight. Good-bye, God bless and keep you!" And the Major retired to his bedroom, and did not stir off his knees for two full hours. After which he went to Pennington's, and thence somewhere else; and Tom met him at four o'clock that morning musing amid unspeakable horrors, quiet, genial, almost cheerful.

"You are a man," said Tom to himself; "and I fancy at times something more than a man; more than me at least."

Tom was right in his fear that after excitement would come collapse; but wrong as to the person to whom it would come. When he arrived at the surgery door, Headley stood waiting for him.

"Anything fresh? Have you seen the Heales?"

"I have been praying with them. Don't be frightened. I am not likely to forget the lesson of this afternoon."

"Then go to bed. It is full twelve o'clock."

"Not yet, I fear. I want you to see old Willis. All is not right."

"Ah! I thought the poor dear old man would kill himself. He has been working too hard, and presuming on his sailor's

power of tumbling in and taking a dog's nap whenever he chose."

"I have warned him again and again: but he was working so magnificently, that one had hardly heart to stop him. And beside, nothing would part him from his maid."

"I don't wonder at that:" quoth Tom to himself. "Is she with him?"

"No: he found himself ill; slipped home on some pretence; and will not hear of our telling her."

"Noble old fellow! Caring for every one but himself to the last." And they went in.

It was one of those rare cases, fatal, yet merciful withal, in which the poison seems to seize the very centre of the life, and to preclude the chance of lingering torture, by one deadening blow.

The old man lay paralysed, cold, pulseless, but quite collected and cheerful. Tom looked, inquired, shook his head, and called for a hot bath of salt and water.

"Warmth we must have, somehow. Anything to keep the fire alight."

"Why so, Sir?" asked the old man. "The fire's been flickering down this many a year. Why not let it go out quietly, at three-score years and ten? You're sure my maid don't know?"

They put him into his bath, and he revived a little.

"No; I am not going to get well; so don't you waste your time on me, Sirs! I'm taken while doing my duty, as I hoped to be. And I've lived to see my maid do hers, as I knew she would, when the Lord called on her. I have,—but don't tell her, she's well employed, and has sorrows enough already, some that you'll know of some day—"

"You must not talk," quoth Tom, who guessed his meaning, and wished to avoid the subject.

"Yes, but I must, Sir. I've no time to lose. If you'd but go and see after those poor Heales, and come again. I'd like to have one word with Mr. Headley; and my time runs short."

"A hundred, if you will," said Frank.

"And now, Sir," when they were alone, "only one thing, if you'll excuse an old sailor," and Willis tried vainly to make his usual salutation; but the cramped hand refused to obey,—"and a dying one too."

"What is it?"

"Only don't be hard on the people, Sir; the people here. They're good-hearted souls, with all their sins, if you'll only take them as you find them, and consider that they've had no chance."

"Willis, Willis, don't talk of that! I shall be a wiser man henceforth, I trust. At least I shall not trouble Aberalva long."

"Oh, Sir, don't talk so; and you just getting a hold of them!"

"I?"

"Yes, you, Sir. They've found you out at last, thank God. I always knew what you were, and said it. They've found you out in the last week; and there's not a man in the town but what would die for you, I believe."

This announcement staggered Frank. Some men it would have only hardened in their pedantry, and have emboldened them to say: "Ah! then these men see that a High Churchman can work like any one else, when there is a practical sacrifice to be made. Now I have a standing ground which no one can dispute, from which to go on, and enforce my idea of what he ought to be."

But, rightly or wrongly, no such thought crossed Frank's mind. He was just as good a Churchman as ever—why not? Just as fond of his own ideal of what a parish and a Church Service ought to be—why not? But the only thought which did rise in his mind was one of utter self-abasement.

"Oh, how blind I have been! How I have wasted my time in laying down the law to these people; fancying myself infallible, as if God were not as near to them as He is to me—certainly nearer than to any book on my shelves—offending their little prejudices, little superstitions, in my own cruel self-conceit and self-will! And now, the first time that I forget my own rules; the first time that I forget almost that I am a priest, even a Christian at all! that moment they acknowledge me as a priest, as a Christian. The moment I meet them upon the commonest human ground, helping them as one heathen would help another, simply because he was his own flesh and blood, that moment they soften to me, and show me how much I might have done with them twelve months ago, had I had but common sense!"

He knelt down and prayed by the old man, for him and for himself.

"Would it be troubling you, Sir?" said the old man at last. "But I'd like to take the Sacrament before I go."

"Of course. Whom shall I ask in?"

The old man paused awhile.

I fear it's selfish: but it seems to me—I would not ask it, but that I know I'm going. I should like to take it with my maid, once more before I die."

"I'll go for her," said Frank, "the moment Thurnall comes back to watch you."

"What need to go yourself, Sir? Old Sarah will go, and willing."

Thurnall came in at that moment.

"I am going to fetch Miss Harvey. Where is she, Captain?"

"At Janey Headon's, along with her two poor children."

"Stay," said Tom, "that's a bad quarter, just at the fish-house back. Have some brandy before you start?"

"No! no Dutch courage!" and Frank was gone. He had a word to say to Grace Harvey, and it must be said at once.

He turned down the silent street, and turned up over stone stairs, through quaint stone galleries and balconies, such as are often huddled together on the cliff sides in fishing towns; into a stifling cottage, the door of which had been set wide open, in the vain hope of fresh air. A woman met him, and clasped both his hands, with tears of joy.

"They're mending, Sir! They're mending, else I'd have sent to tell you. I never looked for you so late."

There was a gentle voice in the next room. It was Grace's.

"Ah, she's praying by them now. She'm giving them all their medicines all along! Whatever I should have done without her!—and in and out all day long, too; till one fancies at whiles the Lord must have changed her into five or six at once, to be everywhere to the same minute."

Frank went in, and listened to her prayer. Her face was as pale and calm as the pale, calm faces of the two worn-out babes, whose heads lay on the pillow close to hers: but her eyes were lit up with an intense glory, which seemed to fill the room with love and light.

Frank listened: but would not break the spell.

At last she rose, looked round, and blushed.

"I beg your pardon, Sir, for taking the liberty. If I had known that you were about, I would have sent: but hearing that you were gone home, I thought you would not be offended, if I gave thanks for them myself. They are my own, Sir, as it were—"

"Oh, Miss Harvey, do not talk so! While you can pray as you were praying then, he who would silence you might be silencing unawares the Lord himself!"

She made no answer, though the change in Frank's tone moved her; and when he told her his errand, that thought also passed from her mind.

At last, "Happy, happy man!" she said calmly; and putting on her bonnet, followed Frank out of the house.

"Miss Harvey," said Frank, as they hurried up the street, "I must say one word to you, before we take that sacrament together."

"Sir?"

"It is well to confess all sins before the Eucharist, and I will confess mine. I have been unjust to you. I know that you hate to be praised; so I will not tell you what has altered my opinion. But Heaven forbid that I should ever do so base a thing, as to take the school away from one who is far more fit to rule in it than ever I shall be!"

Grace burst into tears.

"Thank God! And I thank you, Sir! Oh, there's never a storm but what some gleam breaks through it! And now, Sir, I would not have told you it before, lest you should fancy that I changed for the sake of gain—though, perhaps, that is pride, as too much else has been. But you will never hear of me inside either of those chapels again."

"What has altered your opinion of them, then?"

"It would take long to tell, Sir: but what happened this morning filled the cup. I begin to think, Sir, that their God and mine are not the same. Though why should I judge them, who worshipped that other God myself till no such long time since; and never knew, poor fool, that the Lord's name was Love?"

"I have found out that, too, in these last days. More shame to me than to you that I did not know it before."

"Well for us both that we do know it now, Sir. For if we believed Him now, Sir, to be aught but perfect Love, how could we look round here to-night, and not go mad?"

"Amen!" said Frank.

And now had the pestilence, of all things on earth, revealed to those two noble souls that God is Love?

Let the reader, if he have supplied Campbell's sermon, answer the question for himself.

They went in, and upstairs to Willis.

Grace bent over the old man, tenderly, but with no sign of sorrow. Dry-eyed, she kissed the old man's forehead; arranged his bed-clothes, woman-like, before she knelt down; and then the three received the Sacrament together.

"Don't turn me out," whispered Tom. "It's no concern of mine, of course: but you are all good creatures, and, somehow, I should like to be with you."

So Tom stayed; and what thoughts passed through his heart are no concern of ours.

Frank put the cup to the old man's lips; the lips closed, sipped, —then opened . . . . . the jaw had fallen.

"Gone," said Grace quietly.

Frank paused, awe-struck.

"Go on, Sir," said she, in a low voice. "He hears it all more

clearly than he ever did before." And by the dead man's side, Frank finished the Communion Service.

Grace rose when it was over, kissed the calm forehead, and went out without a word.

"Tom," said Frank, in a whisper, "come into the next room with me."

Tom hardly heard the tone in which the words were spoken, or he would perhaps have answered otherwise than he did.

"My father takes the Communion," said he, half to himself. "At least, it is a beautiful old—"

Howsoever the sentence would have been finished, Tom stopped short—

"Hey?—What does that mean?"

"At last?" gasped Frank, gently enough. "Excuse me!" He was bowed almost double, crushing Thurnall's arm in the fierce gripe of pain.

"Pish!—Hang it!—Impossible!—There, you are all right now!"

"For the time. I can understand many things now. Curious sensation it is, though. Can you conceive a sword put in on one side of the waist, just above the hip-bone, and drawn through, handle and all, till it passes out at the opposite point?"

"I have felt it twice; and therefore you will be pleased to hold your tongue and go to bed. Have you had any warnings?"

"Yes,—no,—that is—this morning: but I forgot. Never mind!—What matter a hundred years hence? There it is again!—God help me!"

"Humph!" growled Thurnall to himself. "I'd sooner have lost a dozen of these herring-hogs, whom nobody misses, and who are well out of their life-scrape: but the parson, just as he was making a man!"

There is no use in complaints. In half an hour Frank is screaming like a woman, though he has bitten his tongue half through to stop his screams.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BLACK HOUND.

Pah! Let us escape anywhere for a breath of fresh air, for even the scent of a clean turf. We have been watching saints and martyrs—perhaps not long enough for the good of our souls, but surely too long for the comfort of our bodies. Let us away up the valley, where we shall find, if not indeed a fresh healthful breeze (for the drought lasts on), at least a cool refreshing

down-draught from Carcarrow Moor before the sun gets up. It is just half-past four o'clock, on a glorious August morning. We shall have three hours at least before the heavens become one great Dutch-oven again.

We shall have good company, too, in our walk; for here comes Campbell fresh from his morning's swim, swinging up the silent street toward Frank Headley's lodging.

He stops, and tosses a pebble against the window-pane. In a minute or two Thurnall opens the street-door and slips out to him.

"Ah, Major! Overslept myself at last; that sofa is wonderfully comfortable. No time to go down and bathe. I'll get my header somewhere up the stream."

"How is he?"

"He? sleeping like a babe, and getting well as fast as his soul will allow his body. He has something on his mind. Nothing to be ashamed of, though, I will warrant; for a purer, nobler fellow I never met."

"When can we move him?"

"Oh, to-morrow, if he will agree. You may all depart and leave me and the Government man to make out the returns of killed and wounded. We shall have no more cholera. Eight days without a new case. We shall do now. I'm glad you are coming up with us."

"I will just see the hounds throw off, and then go back and get Headley's breakfast."

"No, no! you mustn't, Sir: you want a day's play."

"Not half as much as you. And I am in no hunting mood just now. Do you take your fill of the woods and the streams, and let me see our patient. I suppose you will be back by noon?"

"Certainly." And the two swing up the street, and out of the town, along the vale toward Treeboze.

For Trebooze of Trebooze has invited them, and Lord Scoutbush, and certain others, to come out otter-hunting; and otter-hunting they will go.

Trebooze has been sorely exercised, during the last fortnight, between fear of the cholera and desire of calling upon Lord Scoutbush—"as I ought to do, of course, as one of the gentry round; he's a Whig, of course, and no more to me than anybody else; but one don't like to let politics interfere;' by which Trebooze glosses over to himself and friends the deep flunkeydom with which he lusteth after a live lord's acquaintance, and one especially in whom he hopes to find even such a one as himself. . . . "Good fellow, I hear he is, too,—good sportsman, smokes like a chimney," and so forth.

So at last, when the cholera has all but disappeared, he comes down to Penalva, and introduces himself, half swaggering, half servile; begins by a string of apologies for not having called before,—"Mrs. Trebooze so afraid of infection, you see, my lord," —which is a lie: then blunders out a few fulsome compliments to Scoutbush's courage in staying; then takes heart at a little joke of Scoutbush's, and tries the free and easy style; fingers his lordship's high-priced Hudsons, and gives a broad hint that he would like to smoke one on the spot; which hint is not taken, any more than the bet of a "pony" which he offers five minutes afterwards, that he will jump his Irish mare in and out of Aberalva pound; is utterly "thrown on his haunches," (as he informs his friend Mr. Creed afterwards,) by Scoutbush's praise of Tom Thurnall, as an "invaluable man, a treasure in such an out-of-the-way place, and really better company than ninety-nine men out of a hundred;" recovers himself again when Scoutbush asks after his otter-hounds, of which he has heard much praise from Tardrew; and launches out once more into sporting conversation of that graceful and lofty stamp which may be perused and perpended in the pages of "Handley Cross," and "Mr. Sponge's Sporting Tour," books painfully true to that uglier and baser side of sporting life, which their clever author has chosen so wilfully to portray.

So, at least, said Scoutbush to himself, when his visitor had departed.

"He's just like a page out of Sponge's Tour, though he's not half as good a fellow as Sponge himself; for Sponge knew he was a snob, and lived up to his calling honestly: but this fellow wants all the while to play at being a gentleman; and—Ugh! how the fellow smelt of brandy, and worse! His hand, too, shook as if he had the palsy, and he chattered and fidgetted like a man with St. Vitus's dance."

"Did he, my lord?" quoth Tom Thurnall, when he heard the same, in a very meaning tone.

And Trebooze, "for his part, couldn't make out that lord—uncommonly agreeable, and easy, and all that: but shoves a fellow off, and sets him down somehow, and in such a * * * civil way, that you don't know where to have him."

However, Trebooze departed in high spirits; for Lord Scoutbush has deigned to say that he will be delighted to see the otter-hounds work any morning that Trebooze likes, and any how—no time too early for him. "He will bring his friend Major Campbell?"

'By all means."

"Expect two or three sporting gentlemen from the neighbourhood, too. Regular good ones, my lord—though they are

county bucks—very much honoured to make your lordship's acquaintance."

Scoutbush expresses himself equally honoured by making their acquaintance, in a tone of bland simplicity, which utterly puzzles Trebooze, who goes a step further.

"Your lordship 'll honour us by taking pot luck afterwards. Can't show you French cookery, you know, and your souffleys and glacys, and all that. Honest saddle o' mutton, and the grounds of old port.—My father laid it down, and I take it up, eh?" And Trebooze gave a wink and a nudge of his elbow, meaning to be witty.

His lordship was exceedingly sorry; it was the most unfortunate accident: but he had the most particular engagement that very afternoon, and must return early from the otter-hunt, and probably sail the next day for Wales. "But," says the little man, who knows all about Trebooze's household, "I shall not fail to do myself the honour of calling on Mrs. Trebooze, and expressing my regret," &c.

So to the otter-hunt is Scoutbush gone, and Campbell and Thurnall after him; for Trebooze has said to himself, "Must ask that blackguard of a doctor—hang him! I wish he were an otter himself; but if he's so thick with his lordship, it won't do to quarrel." For, indeed, Thurnall might tell tales. So Trebooze swallows his spite and shame,—as do many folk who call themselves his betters, when they have to deal with a great man's hanger-on,—and sends down a note to Tom:

"Mr. Trebooze requests the pleasure of Mr. Thurnall's company with his hounds at . . . ."

And Tom accepts—why not? and chats with Campbell, as they go, on many things; and among other things on this,—

"By the bye," said he, "I got an hour's shore-work yesterday afternoon, and refreshing enough it was. And I got a prize, too. The sucking barnacle which you asked for: I was certain I should get one or two, if I could have a look at the pools this week. Jolly little dog! he was paddling and spinning about last night, and enjoying himself, 'ere age with creeping'—What is it?—'hath clawed him in his clutch.' That fellow's destiny is not a hopeful analogy for you, Sir, who believe that we shall rise after we die into some higher and freer state."

"Why not?"

"Why, which is better off, the free swimming larva, or the perfect cirrhipod, rooted for ever motionless to the rock?"

"Which is better off, the roving young fellow who is sowing his wild oats, or the man who has settled down, and become a respectable landowner with a good house over his head?'

"And begun to propagate his species? Well, you have me there, Sir, as far as this life is concerned; but you will confess that the barnacle's history proves that all crawling grubs don't turn into butterflies."

"I dare say the barnacle turns into what is best for him; at all events, what he deserves. That rule of yours will apply to him, to whomsoever it will not."

"And so does penance for the sins of his youth, as some of us are to do in the next world?"

"Perhaps yes; perhaps no; perhaps neither."

"Do you speak of us, or the barnacle?"

"Of both."

"I am glad of that; for on the popular notion of our being punished a million years hence for what we did when we were lads, I never could see anything but a misery and injustice in our having come into the world at all."

"I can," said the Major quietly.

"Of course I meant nothing rude: but I had to buy my experience, and paid for it dearly enough in folly."

"So had I to buy mine."

"Then why be punished over and above? Why have to pay for the folly, which was itself only the necessary price of experience?"

"For being, perhaps, so foolish as not to use the experience after it has cost you so dear."

"And will punishment cure me of the foolishness?"

"That depends on yourself. If it does, it must needs be so much the better for you. But perhaps you will not be punished, but forgiven."

"Let off? That would be a very bad thing for me, unless I become a very different man from what I have been as yet. I am always right glad now to get a fall whenever I make a stumble. I should have gone to sleep in my tracks long ago else, as one used to do in the back woods on a long elk hunt."

"Perhaps you may become a very different man."

"I should be sorry for that, even if it were possible."

"Why? Do you consider yourself perfect?"

"No . . . But somehow, Thomas Thurnall is an old friend of mine, the first I ever had; and I should be sorry to lose his company."

"I don't think you need fear doing so. You have seen an insect go through strange metamorphoses, and yet remain the same individual; why should not you and I do so likewise?"

"Well?"

"Well—There are some points about you, I suppose, which you would not be sorry to have altered?"

"A few," quoth Tom, laughing. "I do not consider myself quite perfect yet."

"What if those points were not really any part of your character, but mere excrescences of disease: or if that be too degrading a notion, mere scars of old wounds, and of the wear and tear of life; and what if, in some future life, all those disappeared, and the true Mr. Thomas Thurnall, pure and simple, were alone left?"

"It is a very hopeful notion. Only, my dear Sir, one is quite self-conceited enough in this imperfect state. What intolerable coxcombs we should all be if we were perfect, and could sit admiring ourselves for ever and ever!"

"But what if that self-conceit and self-dependence were the very root of all the disease, the cause of all the scars, the very thing which will have to be got rid of, before our true character and true manhood can be developed?"

"Yes, I understand. Faith and humility .... You will forgive me, Major Campbell. I shall learn to respect those virtues when good people have defined them a little more exactly, and can show me somewhat more clearly in what faith differs from superstition, and humility from hypocrisy."

"I do not think any man will ever define them for you. But you may go through a course of experiences, more severe, probably, than pleasant, which may enable you at last to define them for yourself."

"Have you defined them?" asked Tom bluntly, glancing round at his companion.

"Faith?—Yes, I trust. Humility?—No, I fear."

"I should like to hear your definition of the former, at least."

"Did I not say that you must discover it for yourself?"

"Yes. Well. When the lesson comes, if it does come, I suppose it will come in some learnable shape; and till then, I must shift for myself—and if self-dependence be a punishable sin, I shall, at all events, have plenty of company whithersoever I go. There is Lord Scoutbush and Trebooze!"

Why did not Campbell speak his mind more clearly to Thurnall?

Because he knew that with such men words are of little avail. The disease was entrenched too strongly in the very centre of the man's being. It seemed at moments as if all his strange adventures and hairbreadth escapes had been sent to do him harm, and not good; to pamper and harden his self-confidence, not to crush it. Therefore Campbell seldom argued with him: but he prayed for him often; for he had begun, as all did who saw much of Tom Thurnall, to admire and respect him, in spite of all his faults.

And now, turning through a woodland path, they descend

toward the river, till they can hear voices below them; Scoutbush laughing quietly, Trebooze laying down the law at the top of his voice.

"How noisy the fellow is, and how he is hopping about!" says Campbell.

"No wonder: he has been soaking, I hear, for the last fortnight, with some worthy compeers, by way of keeping off cholera. I must have my eye on him to-day."

Scrambling down through the brushwood, they found themselves in such a scene as Creswick alone knows how to paint: though one element of beauty, which Creswick uses full well, was wanting; and the whole place was seen, not by slant sun-rays, gleaming through the boughs, and dappling all the pebbles with a lacework of leaf shadows, but in the uniform and sober grey of dawn.

A broad bed of shingle, looking just now more like an ill-made turnpike road than the bed of Alva stream; above it, a long shallow pool, which showed every stone through the transparent water; on the right, a craggy bank, bedded with deep wood sedge and orange-tipped king ferns, clustering beneath sallow and maple bushes already tinged with gold; on the left, a long bar of gravel, covered with giant "butterbur" leaves; in and out of which the hounds are brushing—beautiful black-and-tan dogs, of which poor Trebooze may be pardonably proud; while round the burleaf-bed dances a rough white Irish terrier, seeming, by his frantic self-importance, to consider himself the master of the hounds.

Scoutbush is standing with Trebooze beyond the bar, upon a little lawn set thick with alders. Trebooze is fussing and fidgetting about, wiping his forehead perpetually; telling everybody to get out of the way, and not to interfere; then catching hold of Scoutbush's button to chatter in his face; then, starting aside to put some part of his dress to rights. His usual lazy drawl is exchanged for foolish excitement. Two or three more gentlemen, tired of Trebooze's absurdities, are scrambling over the rocks above, in search of spraints. Old Tardrew waddles stooping along the line where grass and shingle meet, his bull-dog visage bent to his very knees.

"Tardrew out hunting?" says Campbell. "Why, it is but a week since his daughter was buried!"

"And why not? I like him better for it. Would he bring her back again by throwing away a good day's sport? Better turn out, as he has done, and forget his feelings, if he has any."

"He has feelings enough, don't doubt. But you are right. There is something very characteristic in the way in which the

English countryman never shows grief, never lets it interfere with business, even with pleasure."

"Hillo! Mr. Trebooze!" says the old fellow, looking up. "Here it is!"

"Spraint?—Spraint?—Spraint?—Where? Eh—what?" cries Trebooze.

"No; but what's as good: here on this alder stump, not an hour old. I thought they beauties starns weren't flemishing for nowt."

"Here! Here! Here! Here! Musical, Musical! Sweetlips! Get out of the way!"—and Trebooze runs down.

Musical examines, throws her nose into the air, and answers by the rich bell-like note of the true otter hound; and all the woodlands ring as the pack dashes down the shingle to her call.

"Over!" shouts Tom. "Here's the fresh spraint our side!"

Through the water splash squire, viscount, steward, and hounds, to the horror of a shoal of par, the only visible tenants of a pool, which, after a shower of rain, would be alive with trout. Where those trout are in the meanwhile is a mystery yet unsolved.

Over dances the little terrier, yapping furiously, and expending his superfluous energy by snapping right and left at the par.

"Hark to Musical! hark to Sweetlips! Down the stream? —No! the old girl has it; right up the bank!"

"How do, Doctor? How do, Major Campbell? Forward! —Forward!—Forward!" shouts Trebooze, glad to escape a longer parley, as with his spear in his left hand, he clutches at the overhanging boughs with his right, and swings himself up, with Peter, the huntsman, after him. Tom follows him; and why?

Because he does not like his looks. That bull-eye is red, and almost bursting; his cheeks are flushed, his lips blue, his hand shakes; and Tom's quick eye has already remarked, from a distance, over and above his new fussiness, a sudden shudder, a quick half-frightened glance behind him; and perceived, too, that the moment Musical gave tongue, he put the spirit-flask to his mouth.

Away go the hounds at score through tangled cover, their merry peal ringing from brake and briar, clashing against the rocks, moaning musically away through distant glens aloft.

Scoutbush and Tardrew "take down" the river-bed, followed by Campbell. It is in his way home; and though the Major has stuck many a pig, shot many a gaur, rhinoceros, and elephant, he disdains not, like a true sportsman, the less dangerous but more scientific excitement of an otter-hunt.

"Hark to the merry merry Christchurch bells! She's up by

this time;—that don't sound like a drag now!" cries Tom, bursting desperately, with elbow-guarded visage, through the tangled scrub. "What's the matter, Trebooze? No, thanks! 'Modest quenchers' won't improve the wind just now."

For Trebooze has halted, panting and bathed in perspiration; has been at the brandy flask again; and now offers Tom a "quencher," as he calls it.

"As you like," says Trebooze sulkily, having meant it as a token of reconciliation, and pushes on.

They are now upon a little open meadow, girdled by green walls of wood; and along the river-bank the hounds are fairly racing. Tom and Peter hold on; Trebooze slackens.

"Your master don't look right this morning, Peter."

Peter lifts his hand to his mouth, to signify the habit of drinking; and then shakes it in a melancholy fashion, to signify that the said habit has reached a lamentable and desperate point.

Tom looks back. Trebooze has pulled up, and is walking, wiping still at his face. The hounds have overrun the scent, and are back again, flemishing about the plashed fence on the river brink.

"Over! over! over!" shouts Peter, tumbling over the fence into the stream, and staggering across.

Trebooze comes up to it, tries to scramble over, mutters something, and sits down astride of a bough.

"You are not well, Squire?"

"Well as ever I was in my life! only a little sick—have been several times lately; couldn't sleep either—haven't slept an hour this week.—Don't know what it is."

"What ducks of hounds those are!" says Tom, trying, for ulterior purposes, to ingratiate himself. "How they are working there all by themselves, like so many human beings. Perfect!—"

"Yes—don't want us—may as well sit here a minute. Awfully hot, eh? What a splendid creature that Miss St. Just is! I say, Peter!"

"Yes, Sir," shouts Peter, from the other side.

"Those hounds ain't right!" with an oath.

"Not right, Sir?"

"Didn't I tell you?—five couple and a half—no, five couple—no, six. Hang it! I can't see, I think! How many hounds did I tell you to bring out?"

"Five couple, Sir."

"Then * * * why did you bring out that other?"

"Which other?" shouts Peter, while Thurnall eyes Trebooze keenly.

"Why that! He's none o' mine! Nasty black cur, how did he get here?"

"Where? There's never no cur here!"

"You lie, you oaf—no—why—Doctor—How many hounds are there here?"

"I can't see," says Tom, "among those bushes."

"Can't see, eh? Why don't those brutes hit it off?" says Trebooze, drawling, as if he had forgotten the matter, and lounging over the fence, drops into the stream, followed by Tom, and wades across.

The hounds are all round him, and he is couraging them on, fussing again more than ever; but without success.

"Gone to hole somewhere here," says Peter.

"* * *!" cries Trebooze, looking round, with a sudden shudder, and face of terror. "There's that black brute again! there, behind me! Hang it, he'll bite me next!" and he caught up his leg, and struck behind him with his spear.

There was no dog there.

Peter was about to speak; but Tom silenced him by a look, and shouted,—

"Here we are! Gone to holt in this alder root!"

"Now then, little Carlingford! Out of the way, puppies!" cries Trebooze, righted again for the moment by the excitement, and thrusting the hounds right and left, he stoops down to put in the little terrier.

Suddenly he springs up, with something like a scream, and then bursts out on Peter with a volley of oaths.

"Didn't I tell you to drive that cur away?"

"Which cur, Sir?" cries Peter, trembling, and utterly confounded.

"That cur! * * * Can't I believe my own eyes? Will you tell me that the beggar didn't bolt between my legs this moment, and went into the hole before the terrier?"

Neither answered. Peter from utter astonishment; Tom because he saw what was the matter.

"Don't stoop, Squire. You'll make the blood fly to your head. Let me—"

But Trebooze thrust him back with curses.

"I'll have the brute out, and send the spear through him!" and flinging himself on his knees again, Trebooze began tearing madly at the roots and stones, shouting to the half-buried terrier to tear the intruder.

Peter looked at Tom, and then wrung his hands in despair.

"Dirty work—beastly work!" muttered Trebooze. "Nothing but slugs and evats!—Toads, too,—hang the toads! What a plague brings all this vermin? Curse it!" shrieked he, springing back, "there's an adder! and he's gone up my sleeve! Help me! Doctor! Thurnall! or I'm a dead man!"

Tom caught the arm, thrust his hand up the sleeve, and seemed to snatch out the snake, and hurl it back into the river.

"All right now!—a near chance, though!"

Peter stood open mouthed.

"I never saw no snake!" cried he.

Tom caught him a buffet which sent him reeling. "Look after your hounds, you blind ass! How are you now, Trebooze?" And he caught the squire round the waist, for he was reeling.

"The world! The world upside down! rocking and swinging! Who's put me feet upwards, like a fly on a ceiling? I'm falling, falling off, into the clouds—into hell-fire—hold me!—Toads and adders! and wasps—to go to holt in a wasp's nest! Drive 'em away,—get me a green bough! I shall be stung to death!"

And tearing off a green bough, the wretched man rushed into the river, beating wildly right and left at his fancied tormentors.

"What is it?" cry Campbell and Scoutbush, who have run up breathless.

"Delirium tremens. Campbell, get home as fast as you can, and send me up a bottle of morphine. Peter, take the hounds home. I must go after him."

"I'll go home with Campbell, and send the bottle up by a man and horse," cries Scoutbush; and away the two trot at a gallant pace, for a cross-country run home.

"Mr. Tardrew, come with me, there's a good man!—I shall want help."

Tardrew made no reply, but dashed through the river at his heels.

Trebooze had already climbed the plashed fence, and was running wildly across the meadow. Tom dragged Tardrew up it after him.

"Thank 'ee, Sir," but nothing more. The two had not met since the cholera.

Trebooze fell, and lay rolling, trying in vain to shield his face from the phantom wasps.

They lifted him up, and spoke gently to him.

"Better get home to Mrs. Trebooze, Sir," said Tardrew, with as much tenderness as his gruff voice could convey.

"Yes, home! home to Molly! My Molly's always kind. She won't let me be eaten up alive. Molly, Molly!"

And shricking for his wife, the wretched man started to run again.

"Molly, I'm in hell! Only help me! you're always right! only forgive me! and I'll never, never again—"

And then came out hideous confessions; then fresh hideous delusions.

* * * * *

Three weary up-hill miles lay between them and the house: but home they got at last.

Trebooze dashed at the house, tore it open; slammed and bolted it behind him, to shut out the pursuing fiends.

"Quick, round by the back-door!" said Tom, who had not opposed him for fear of making him furious, but dreaded some tragedy if he were left alone.

But his fear was needless. Trebooze looked into the breakfast-room. It was empty; she was not out of bed yet. He rushed upstairs into her bed-room, shrieking her name; she leaped up to meet him; and the poor wretch buried his head in that faithful bosom, screaming to her to save him from he knew not what.

She put her arms round him, soothed him, wept over him sacred tears. "My William! my own William! Yes, I will take care of you! Nothing shall hurt you,—my own, own!"

Vain, drunken, brutal, unfaithful. Yes: but her husband still.

There was a knock at the door.

"Who is that?" she cried, with her usual fierceness, terrified for his character, not terrified for herself.

"Mr. Thurnall, Madam. Have you any laudanum in the house?"

"Yes, here! Oh, come in! Thank God you are come! What is to be done?"

Tom looked for the laudanum bottle, and poured out a heavy dose.

"Make him take that, Madam, and put him to bed. I will wait downstairs awhile!"

"Thurnall, Thurnall!" calls Trebooze: "don't leave me, old fellow! you are a good fellow. I say, forgive and forget. Don't leave me! Only don't leave me, for the room is as full of devils as——"

* * * * *

An hour after, Tom and Tardrew were walking home together.

"He is quite quiet now, and fast asleep."

"Will he mend, Sir?" asks Tardrew.

"Of course, he will: and perhaps in more ways than one. Best thing that could have happened—will bring him to his senses, and he'll start fresh."

"We'll hope so,—he's been mad, I think, ever since he heard of that cholera."

"So have others: but not with brandy," thought Tom: but he said nothing.

"I say, Sir," quoth Tardrew, after a while, "how's Parson Headley?"

"Getting well, I'm happy to say."

"Glad to hear it, Sir. He's a good man, after all; though we did have our differences. But he's a good man, and worked like one."

"He did."

Silence again.

"Never heard such beautiful prayers in all my life, as he made over my poor maid."

"I don't doubt it," said Tom. "He understands his business at heart, though he may have his fancies."

"And so do some others," said Tardrew in a gruff tone, as if half to himself, "who have no fancies. . . . . Tell you what it is, Sir: you was right this time; and that's plain truth. I'm sorry to hear talk of your going."

"My good Sir," quoth Tom, "I shall be very sorry to go. I have found place and people here as pleasant as man could wish: but go I must."

"Glad you're satisfied, Sir; wish you was going to stay," says Tardrew. "Seen Miss Harvey this last day or two, Sir?"

"Yes. You know she's to keep her school?"

"I know it. Nursed my girl like an angel."

"Like what she is," said Tom.

"You said one true word once: that she was too good for us."

"For this world," said Tom; and fell into a great musing.

By those curt and surly utterances did Tardrew, in true British bulldog fashion, express a repentance too deep for words; too deep for all confessionals, penances, and emotions or acts of contrition; the repentance not of the excitable and theatric southern, unstable as water, even in his most violent remorse: but of the still, deep-hearted northern, whose pride breaks slowly and silently, but breaks once for all; who tells to God what he will never tell to man; and having told it, is a new creature from that day forth for ever.

CHAPTER XIX.

BEDDGELERT.

The pleasant summer voyage is over. The Waterwitch is lounging off Port Madoc, waiting for her crew. The said crew are busy on shore drinking the ladies' healths, with a couple of sovereigns which Valencia has given them, in her sister's name and her own. The ladies, under the care of Elsley, and the far more practical care of Mr. Bowie, are rattling along among

children, maids, and boxes, over the sandy flats of the Traeth Mawr, beside the long reaches of the lazy stream, with the blue surges of the hills in front, and the silver sea behind. Soon they begin to pass wooded knolls, islets of rock in the alluvial plain. The higher peaks of Snowdon sink down behind the lower spurs in front; the plain narrows; closes in, walled round with woodlands clinging to the steep hill-sides; and, at last, they enter the narrow gorge of Pont-Aberglaslyn,—pretty enough, no doubt, but much over-praised; for there are in Devon alone a dozen passes far grander, both for form and size.

Soon they emerge again on flat meadows, mountain-cradled; and the grave of the mythic greyhound, and the fair old church, shrouded in tall trees; and last, but not least, at the famous Leek Hotel, where ruleth Mrs. Lewis, great and wise, over the four months' Babylon of guides, cars, chambermaids, tourists, artists, and reading-parties, camp-stools, telescopes, poetry-books, blue uglies, red petticoats, and parasols of every hue.

There they settle down in the best rooms in the house, and all goes as merrily as it can, while the horrors which they have left behind them hang, like a black background, to all their thoughts. However, both Scoutbush and Campbell send as cheerful reports as they honestly can; and gradually the exceeding beauty of the scenery, and the amusing bustle of the village, make them forget, perhaps, a good deal which they ought to have remembered.

As for poor Lucia, no one will complain of her for being happy; for feeling that she has got a holiday, the first for now four years, and trying to enjoy it to the utmost. She has no household cares. Mr. Bowie manages everything, and does so, in order to keep up the honour of the family, on a somewhat magnificent scale. The children, in that bracing air, are better than she has ever seen them. She has Valencia all to herself; and Elsley, in spite of the dark fancies over which he has been brooding, is better behaved, on the whole, than usual.

He has escaped—so he considers—escaped from Campbell, above all from Thurnall. From himself, indeed, he has not escaped; but the company of self is, on the whole, more pleasant to him than otherwise just now. For though he may turn up his nose at tourists and reading-parties, and long for contemplative solitude, yet there is a certain pleasure to some people, and often strongest in those who pretend most shyness, in the "digito monstrari, et dicerj, hic est:" in taking for granted that everybody has read his poems; that everybody is saying in their hearts, "There goes Mr. Vavasour, the distinguished poet. I wonder what he is writing now? I wonder where he has been to-day, and what he has been thinking of."

So Elsley went up Hebog, and looked over the glorious vista of the vale, over the twin lakes, and the rich sheets of woodland, with Aran and Moel Meirch guarding them right and left, and the greystone glaciers of the Glyder walling up the valley miles above. And they went up Snowdon, too, and saw little beside fifty fog-blinded tourists, five-and-twenty dripping ponies, and five hundred empty porter-bottles; wherefrom they returned, as do many, disgusted, and with great colds in their heads. But most they loved to scramble up the crags of Dinas Emrys, and muse over the ruins of the old tower, "where Merlin taught Vortigern the courses of the stars;" till the stars set and rose as they had done for Merlin and his pupil, behind the four great peaks of Aran, Siabod, Cnicht, and Hebog, which point to the four quarters of the heavens: or to lie by the side of the boggy spring, which once was the magic well of the magic castle, till they saw in fancy the white dragon and the red rise from its depths once more, and fight high in air the battle which foretold the fall of the Cymry before the Sassenach invader.

One thing, indeed, troubled Elsley,—that Claude was his only companion; for Valencia avoided carefully any more *tête-à-tête* walks with him. She had found out her mistake, and devoted herself now to Lucia. She had a fair excuse enough, for Lucia was not just then in a state for rambles and scrambles; and of that Elsley certainly had no right to complain; so that he was forced to leave them both at home, with as good grace as he could muster, and to wander by himself, scribbling his fancies, while they lounged and worked in the pleasant garden of the hotel, with Bowie fetching and carrying for them all day long, and intimating pretty roundly to Miss Clara his "opeeenion," that he "was very proud and thankful of the office: but he did think that he had to do a great many things for Mrs. Vavasour every day which would come with a much better grace from Mr. Vavasour himself; and that, when he married, he should not leave his wife to be nursed by other men."

Which last words were spoken with an ulterior object, well understood by the hearer; for between Clara and Bowie there was one of those patient and honourable attachments so common between worthy servants. They had both "kept company," though only by letter, for the most part, for now five years; they had both saved a fair sum of money; and Clara might have married Bowie when she chose, had she not thought it her duty to take care of her mistress; while Bowie considered himself equally indispensable to the welfare of that "puir feckless laddie," his master.

So they waited patiently, amusing the time by little squabbles

of jealousy, real or pretended; and Bowie was faithful, though Clara was past thirty now, and losing her good looks.

"So ye'll see your lassie, Mr. Bowie!" said Sergeant MacArthur, his intimate, when he started for Aberalva that summer. "I'm thinking ye'd better put her out of her pain soon. Five years is ower lang courting, and she's na pullet by now, saving your pardon."

"Hoooo ——," says Bowie; "leave the green gooseberries to the lads, and gi' me the ripe fruit, Sergeant."

However, he found love-making in his own fashion so pleasant, that, not content with carrying Mrs. Vavasour's babies about all day long, he had several times to be gently turned out of the nursery, where he wanted to assist in washing and dressing them, on the ground that an old soldier could turn his hand to anything.

So slipped away a fortnight and more, during which Valencia was the cynosure of all eyes, and knew it also: for Claude Mellot, half to amuse her, and half to tease Elsley, made her laugh many a time by retailing little sayings and doings in her praise and dispraise, picked up from rich Manchester gentlemen, who would fain have married her without a penny, and from strong-minded Manchester ladies, who envied her beauty a little, and set her down, of course, as an empty-minded worldling, and a proud aristocrat. The majority of the reading-parties, meanwhile, thought a great deal more about Valencia than about their books. The Oxford men, it seemed, though of the same mind as the Cambridge men in considering her the model of all perfection, were divided as to their method of testifying the same. Two or three of them, who were given to that simpering and flirting tone with young ladies to which Oxford would-be-fine gentlemen are so pitiably prone, hung about the inn-door to ogle her; contrived always to be walking in the garden when she was there, dressed out as if for High Street at four o'clock on a May afternoon; tormented Claude by fruitless attempts to get from him an introduction, which he had neither the right nor the mind to give; and at last (so Bowie told Claude one night, and Claude told the whole party next morning) tried to bribe and flatter Valencia's maid into giving them a bit of ribbon, or a cast-off glove, which had belonged to the idol. Whereon that maiden, in virtuous indignation, told Mr. Bowie, and complained moreover (as maids are bound to do to valets for whom they have a penchant), of their having dared to compliment her on her own good looks: by which act she succeeded, of course, in making Mr. Bowie understand that other people still thought her pretty, if he did not; and also in arousing in him that jealousy which is often the best helpmate of sweet love. So Mr. Bowie went forth in

his might that very evening, and finding two of the Oxford men, informed them in plain Scotch, that, "Gin he caught them, or any ither such skellums, philandering after his leddies, or his leddies' maids he'd jist knock their empty pows togither." To which there was no reply but silence; for Mr. Bowie stood six feet four without his shoes, and had but the week before performed, for the edification of the Cambridge men, who held him in high honour, a few old Guards' feats; such as cutting in two at one sword-blow a suspended shoulder of mutton; lifting a long table by his teeth; squeezing a quart pewter pot flat between his fingers; and other little recreations of those who are "born unto Rapha."

But the Cantabs, and a couple of gallant Oxford boating men who had fraternised with them, testified their admiration in their simple honest way, by putting down their pipes whenever they saw Valencia coming, and just lifting their hats when they met her close. It was taking a liberty, no doubt. "But I tell you, Mellot," said Wynd, as brave and pure-minded a fellow as ever pulled in the University eight, "the Arabs, when they see such a creature, say, 'Praise Allah for beautiful women,' and quite right; they may remind some fellows of worse things, but they always remind me of heaven and the angels; and my hat goes off to her by instinct, just as it does when I go into a church."

That was all; simple chivalrous admiration, and delight in her loveliness, as in that of a lake, or a mountain sunset; but nothing more. The good fellows had no time, indeed, to fancy themselves in love with her, or her with them, for every day was too short for them; what with reading all the morning, and starting out in the afternoon in strange garments (which became shabbier and more ragged very rapidly as the weeks slipped on) upon all manner of desperate errands; walking unheard-of distances, and losing their way upon the mountains; scrambling cliffs, and now and then falling down them; camping all night by unpronounceable takes, in the hope of catching mythical trout; trying in all ways how hungry, thirsty, dirty, and tired a man could make himself, and how far he could go without breaking his neck, any approach to which catastrophe was hailed (as were all other mishaps) as "all in the day's work," and "the finest fun in the world," by that unconquerable English "lebensglückseligkeit," which is a perpetual wonder to our sober German cousins. Ah, glorious twenty-one, with your inexhaustible powers of doing and enjoying, eating and hungering, sleeping and sitting up, reading and playing! Happy are those who still possess you, and can take their fill of your golden cup, steadied, but not saddened, by the remembrance, that for all things a good and loving God will bring them into judgment. Happier still those who (like a few) retain in

body and soul the health and buoyancy of twenty-one on to the very verge of forty, and seeming to grow younger-hearted as they grow older-headed, can cast off care and work at a moment's warning, laugh and frolic now as they did twenty years ago, and say with Wordsworth—

> "So was it when I was a boy,
> So let it be when I am old,
> Or let me die!"

Unfortunately, as will appear hereafter, Elsley's especial *bêtes noirs* were this very Wynd and his inseparable companion, Naylor, who happened to be not only the best men of the set, but Mellot's especial friends. Both were Rugby men, now reading for their degree. Wynd was a Shropshire squire's son, a lissom fair-haired man, the handiest of boxers, rowers, riders, shots, fishermen, with a noisy superabundance of animal spirits, which maddened Elsley. Yet Wynd had sentiment in his way, though he took good care never to show it Elsley; could repeat Tennyson from end to end; spouted the Mort d'Arthur up hill and down dale, and chaunted rapturously, "Come into the garden, Maud!" while he expressed his opinion of Maud's lover in terms more forcible than delicate. Naylor, fidus Achates, was a Gloucestershire parson's son, a huge heavy-looking man, with a thick curling lip, and a sleepy eye; but he had brains enough to become a first-rate classic; and in that same sleepy eye and heavy lip lay an infinity of quiet humour; racy old country stories, quaint scraps of out-of-the-way learning, jovial old ballads, which he sang with the mellowest of voices, and a slang vocabulary, which made him the dread of all bargees from Newnham pool to Upware. Him also Elsley hated, because Naylor looked always as if he was laughing at him, which indeed he was.

And the worst was, that Elsley had always to face them both at once. If Wynd vaulted over a gate into his very face, with a "How de' do, Mr. Vavasour? Had any verses this morning?" in the same tone as if he had asked, "Had any sport?" Naylor's round face was sure to look over the stone-wall, pipe in mouth, with a "Don't disturb the gentleman, Tom; don't you see he's a composing of his rhymes?" in a strong provincial dialect put on for the nonce. In fact, the two young rogues, having no respect whatsoever for genius, perhaps because they had each of them a little genius of their own, made a butt of the poet, as soon as they found out that he was afraid of them.

But worse *bêtes noirs* than either Wynd or Naylor were on their way to fill up the cup of Elsley's discomfort. And at last, without a note of warning, appeared in Beddgelert a phenome-

non which rejoiced some hearts, but perturbed also the spirits not only of the Oxford "philanderers," but those of Elsley Vavasour, and, what is more, of Valencia herself.

She was sitting one evening at the window with Lucia, looking out into the village and the pleasure-grounds before the hotel. They were both laughing and chatting over the groups of tourists in their pretty Irish way, just as they had done when they were girls; for Lucia's heart was expanding under the quiet beauty of the place, the freedom from household care, and what was more, from money anxieties; for Valencia had slipped into her hand a cheque for fifty pounds from Scoutbush, and assured her that he would be quite angry if she spoke of paying the rent of the rooms; Elsley was mooning down the river by himself; Claude was entertaining his Cambridge acquaintances, as he did every night, with his endless fun and sentiment. Gradually the tourists slipt in one by one, as the last rays of the sun faded off the peaks of Aran, and the mist settled down upon the dark valley beneath, and darkness fell upon that rock-girdled paradise; when up to the door below there drove a car, at sight whereof out rushed, not waiters only and landlady, but Mr. Bowie himself, who helped out a very short figure in a pea-jacket and a shining boating hat, and then a very tall one in a wild shooting-coat and a military cap.

"My brother, and mon Saint Père! Lucia! too delightful! This is why they did not write." And Valencia sprang up, and was going to run down stairs to them, when she paused at Lucia's call.

"Who have they with them? Val,—come and look! who can it be?"

Campbell and Bowie were helping out carefully a tall man, covered up in many wrappers. It was too dark to see the face; but a fancy crossed Valentia's mind which made her look grave, in spite of her pleasure.

He was evidently weak, as from recent illness; for his two supporters led him up the steps, and Scoutbush seemed full of directions and inquiries, and fussed about with the landlady, till she was tired of curtseying to "my lord."

A minute afterwards Bowie threw open the door grandly. "My lord, my ladies!" and in trotted Scoutbush, and began kissing them fiercely, and then dancing about.

"Oh my dears! Here at last—out of that horrid city of the plague! Such sights as I have seen—" and then he paused. "Do you know, Val and Lucia, I'm glad I've seen it: I don't know, but I feel as if I should be a better man all my life; and those poor people, how well they did behave! And the Major, he's an angel! And so's that brick of a doctor, and the mad

schoolmistress, and the curate. Everybody, I think, but me. Hang it, Val! but your words shan't come true! I will be of some use yet before I die! But I've—" and Valencia went up to him and kissed him, while he ran on, and Lucia said,—

"You have been of use already, dear Fred. You have sent me and the dear children to this sweet place, where we have been safer and happier than—" (she checked herself); "and your generous present too. I feel quite a girl again, thanks to you. Val and I have done nothing but laugh all day long;" and she began kissing him too.

"How happy could I be with either,
Were t'other dear charmer away!"

broke out Scoutbush. "What a pity it is now, that I should have two such sweet creatures making love to me, and can't marry either of them? Why did ye go and be my father's daughters, mavourneen? I'd have made a peeress of the one of ye, if ye'd had the sense to be anybody else's sisters."

At which they all laughed, and laughed, and chattered broad Irish together as they used to do for fun in old Kilanbaggan Castle, before Lucia was a weary wife, and Valencia a worldly fine lady, and Scoutbush a rackety guardsman, breaking half of the ten commandments every week, rather from ignorance than vice.

"Well, I'm glad ye're pleased with me, asthore," said he at last to Lucia; "but I've done another little good deed, I flatter myself; for I've brought away the poor spalpeen of a priest, and have got him safe in the house."

Valencia stopped short in her fun.

"Why, what have ye to say against that, Miss Val?"

"Why, won't he be a little in the way?" said Valencia, not knowing what to say.

"Faith, he needn't trouble you; and I shall take very good care—I wonder when the supper is coming—that neither he nor any else troubles me. But really," said he, in his natural voice, and with some feeling, "I was ashamed to go away and leave him there. He would have died if we had. He worked day and night. Talk of saints and martyrs! Campbell himself said he was an idler by the side of him."

"Oh! I hope Major Campbell has not over-exerted himself!"

"He? nothing hurts him. He's as hard as his own sword. But the poor curate worked on till he got the cholera himself. He always expected it, longed for it; Campbell said—wanted to die. Some love affair, I suppose, poor fellow!—and a terrible bout he had for eight-and-forty hours. Thurnall thought him gone again and again; but he pulled the poor fellow through, after all; and we got some one (that is, Campbell did) to take his

duty; and brought him away, after a good deal of persuasion; for he would not move as long as there was a fresh case in the town: that is why we never wrote. We did not know till the last hour when we should start; and we expected to be with you in two days, and give you a pleasant surprise. He was half dead when we got him on board: but the week's sea-air helped him through; so I must not grumble at these northerly breezes. 'It's an ill wind that blows nobody good,' they say!"

Valencia heard all this as in a dream; and watched her chattering brother with a stupified air. She comprehended all now; and bitterly she blamed herself. He had really loved her, then; set himself manfully to die at his post, that he might forget her in a better world. How shamefully she had trifled with that noble heart! How should she ever meet—how have courage to look him in the face? And not love, or anything like love, but sacred pity and self-abasement filled her heart, as his fair, delicate face rose up before her, all wan and shrunken, with sad upbraiding eyes; and round it such a halo, pure and pale, as crowns, in some old German picture, a martyr's head.

"He has had the cholera! he has been actually dying?" asked she at last, with that strange wish to hear over again bad news, which one knows too well already.

"Of course he has. Why, you are not going away, Valencia? You need not be afraid of infection. Campbell, and Thurnall, too. says that's all nonsense; and they must know, having seen it so often. Here comes Bowie at last with supper!"

"Has Mr. Headley had anything to eat?" asked Valencia, who longed to run away to her own room, but dared not.

"He is eating now like any ged, Ma'am; and Major Campbell's making him eat too."

"He must be very ill," thought she, "for mon Saint Père never to have come near us yet:" and then she thought with terror that her Saint Père might have guessed the truth, and be angry with her. And yet she trusted in Frank's secrecy. He would not betray her.

Take care, Valencia. When a woman has to trust a man not to betray her, and does trust him, she may soon find it not only easy, but necessary, to do more than trust him.

However, in five minutes Campbell came in. Valencia saw at once that there was no change in his feelings to her: but he could talk of nothing but Headley, his self-devotion, courage, angelic gentleness, and humility; and every word of his praise was a fresh arrow in Valencia's conscience; at last,—

"One knows well enough what is the matter," said he, almost bitterly—"what is the matter, I sometimes think, with half the noblest men in the world, and nine-tenths of the noblest women;

and with many a one, too, God help them! who is none of the noblest, and therefore does not know how to take the bitter cup, as he knows—"

"What does the philosopher mean now?" asked Scoutbush, looking up from the cold lamb. Valencia knew but too well what he meant.

"He has a history, my dear Lord."

"A history? What! is he writing a book?"

Campbell laughed a quiet under-laugh, half sad, half humorous.

"I am very tired," said Valencia; "I really think I shall go to bed."

She went to her room; but to bed she did not go: she sat down and cried till she could cry no more, and lay awake the greater part of the night, tossing miserably. She would have done better if she had prayed; but prayer, about such a matter, was what Valencia knew nothing of. She was regular enough at church, of course, and said her prayers and confessed her sins in a general way, and prayed about her "soul," as she had been taught to do,—unless she was too tired: but to pray really, about a real sorrow, a real sin like this, was a thought which never entered her mind; and if it had, she would have driven it away again: just because the anxiety was so real, practical, human, it was a matter which had nothing to do with religion; which it seemed impertinent—almost wrong to lay before the Throne of God.

So she came downstairs next morning, pale, restless, unrefreshed in body or mind; and her peace of mind was not improved by seeing, seated at the breakfast-table, Frank Headley, whom Lucia and Scoutbush were stuffing with all manner of good things.

She blushed scarlet—do what she would she could not help it—when he rose and bowed to her. Half choked, she came forward and offered her hand. She was "so shocked to hear that he had been so dangerously ill,—no one had even told them of it,—it had come upon them so suddenly;" and so forth.

She spoke kindly, but avoided the least tone of tenderness: for she felt that if she gave way, she might be only too tender; and to re-awaken hope in his heart would be only cruelty. And, therefore, and for other reasons also, she did not look him in the face as she spoke.

He answered so cheerfully that she was half disappointed, in spite of her remorse, at his not being as miserable as she had expected. Still, if he had overcome the passion, it was so much better for him. But yet Valencia hardly wished that he should have overcome it, so self-contradictory is woman's heart; and her pity had sunk to half-ebb, and her self-complacency was rising

with a flowing tide, as he chatted on quietly, but genially, about the voyage, and the scenery, and Snowdon, which he had never seen, and which he would ascend that very day.

"You will do nothing of the kind, Mr. Headley!" cried Lucia. 'Is he not mad, Major Campbell, quite mad?"

"I know I am mad, my dear Mrs. Vavasour; I have been so a long time: but Snowdon ponies are in their sober senses,—and I shall take one of them."

"Fulfil the old pun?—Begin beside yourself, and end beside your horse! I am sure he is not strong enough to sit over those rocks. No, you shall stay at home comfortably here; Valencia and I will take care of you."

"And mon Saint Père too. I have a thousand things to say to him."

"And so has he to Queen Whims."

So Scoutbush sent Bowie for "John Jones Clerk," the fisherman, (may his days be as many as his salmon, and as good as his flies!) and the four stayed at home, and talked over the Aberalva tragedies, till, as it befell, both Lucia and Campbell left the room awhile.

Immediately Frank rose, and walking across to Valencia, laid the fatal ring on the arm of her chair, and returned to his seat without a word.

"You are very——. I hope that it——," stammered Valencia.

"You hope that it was a comfort to me? It was; and I shall be always grateful to you for it."

Valencia heard an emphasis on the "was." It checked the impulse (foolish enough) which rose in her, to bid him keep the ring.

So, prim and dignified, she slipped it into its place on her finger, and went on with her work; merely saying,—

"I need not say that I am happy that anything which I could do should have been of use to you in such a fearful time."

"It was a fearful time! but for myself, I cannot be too glad of it. God grant that it may have been as useful to others as to me! It cured me of a great folly. Now I look back, I am astonished at my own absurdity, rudeness, presumption.—You must let me say it!—I do not know how to thank you enough I cannot trust myself with the fit words, they would be so strong: but I owe this confession to you, and to your exceeding goodness and kindness, when you would have been justified in treating me as a madman. I was mad, I believe: but I am in my right mind now, I assure you," said he gaily. "Had I not been, I need hardly say you would not have seen me here. What a prospect this is!" And he rose and looked out of the window.

Valencia had heard all this with downcast eyes and unmoved face. Was she pleased at it? Not in the least, the naughty child that she was; and more, she grew quite angry with herself, ashamed of herself, for having thought and felt so much about him the night before. "How silly of me! He is very well, and does not care for me. And who is he, pray, that I should even look at him?"

And, as if in order to put her words into practice, she looked at him there and then. He was gazing out of the window, leaning gracefully and yet feebly against the shutter, with the full glory of the forenoon sun upon his sharp-cut profile and rich chestnut locks; and after all, having looked at him once, she could not help looking at him again. He was certainly a most gentleman-like man, elegant from head to foot; there was not an ungraceful line about him, to his very boots, and the white nails of his slender fingers; even the defects of his figure—the too great length of the neck and slope of the shoulders—increased his likeness to those saintly pictures with which he had been mixed up in her mind the night before. He was at one extreme pole of the different types of manhood, and that burly doctor who had saved his life at the other: but her Saint Père alone perfectly combined the two. There was nobody like him, after all. Perhaps her wisest plan, as Headley had forgotten his fancy, was to confess all to the Saint Père (as she usually did her little sins), and get some sort of absolution from him.

However, she must say something in answer—

"Yes, it is a very lovely view; but really I must say one more word about this matter. I have to thank you, you know, for the good faith which you have kept with me."

He looked round, seemingly amused. "*Cela va sans dire!*" and he bowed; "pray do not say any more about the matter;" and he looked at her with such humble and thankful eyes, that Valencia was sorry not to hear more from him than—

"Pray tell me—for of course you know—the name of this exquisite valley up which I am looking."

"Gwynnant. You must go up it when you are well enough, and see the lakes; they are the only ones in Snowdon from the banks of which the primæval forest has not disappeared."

"Indeed? I must make shift to go there this very afternoon, for—do not laugh at me—but I never saw a lake in my life."

"Never saw a lake?"

"No. I am a true Lowlander: born and bred among bleak Norfolk sands and fens—so much the worse for this chest of mine; and this is my first sight of mountains. It is all like

a dream to me, and a dream which I never expected to be realized."

"Ah, you should see our Irish lakes and mountains—you should see Killarney!"

"I am content with these; I suppose it is as wrong to break the tenth commandment about scenery, as about anything else."

"Ah, but it seems so hard that you, who I am sure would appreciate fine scenery, should have been debarred from it, while hundreds of stupid people run over the Alps and Italy every summer, and come home, as far as I can see, rather more stupid than they went; having made confusion worse confounded by filling their poor brains with hard names out of Murray."

"Not quite so hard as that thousands, every day, who would enjoy a meat dinner, should have nothing but dry bread, and not enough of that. I fancy sometimes, that, in some mysterious way, that want will be made up to them in the next life; and so with all the beautiful things which travelled people talk of—I comfort myself with the fancy, that I see as much as is good for me here, and that if I make good use of that, I shall see the Alps and the Andes in the world to come, or something much more worth seeing. Tell me now, how far may that range of crags be from us? I am sure that I could walk there after luncheon, this mountain air is strengthening me so."

"Walk thither? I assure you they are at least four miles off."

"Four? And I thought them one! So clear and sharp as they stand out against the sky, one fancies that one could almost stretch out a hand and touch those knolls and slabs of rock, as distinct as in a photograph; and yet so soft and rich withal, dappled with pearly-grey stone and purple heath. Ah!—So it must be, I suppose. The first time that one sees a glorious thing, one's heart is lifted up towards it in love and awe, till it seems near to one—ground on which one may freely tread, because one appreciates and admires; and so one forgets the distance between its grandeur and one's own littleness."

The allusion was palpable: but did he intend it? Surely not, after what he had just said. And yet there was a sadness in the tone which made Valencia fancy that some feeling for her might still linger: but he evidently had been speaking to himself, forgetful, for the moment, of her presence; for he turned to her with a start and a blush—"But now—I have been troubling you too long with this stupid *tête-à-tête* sentimentality of mine. I will make my bow, and find the Major. I am afraid, if it be possible for him to forget any one, he has forgotten me in some new moss or other."

He went out, and to Valencia's chagrin she saw him no more

that day. He spent the forenoon in the garden, and the afternoon in lying down, and at night complained of fatigue, and stayed in his own room the whole evening, while Campbell read him to sleep. Next morning, however, he made his appearance at breakfast, well and cheerful.

"I must play at sick man no more, or I shall rob you, I see, of Major Campbell's company; and I owe you all for too much already."

"Unless you are better than you were last night, you must play at sick man," said the Major. "I cannot conceive what exhausted you so; unless you ladies are better nurses, I must let no one come near him but myself. If you had been scolding him the whole morning, instead of praising him as he deserves, he could not have been more tired last night."

"Pray do not!" cried Frank, evidently much pained; "I had such a delightful morning, and every one is so kind—you only make me wretched, when I feel all the trouble I am giving."

"My dear fellow," said Scoutbush *en grand sérieux*, "after all that you have done for our people at Aberalva, I should be very much shocked if any of my family thought any service shown to you a trouble."

"Pray do not speak so," said Frank, "I am fallen among angels, when I least expected."

"Scoutbush as an angel!" shrieked Lucia, clapping her hands. "Elsley, don't you see the wings sprouting already, under his shooting jacket?"

"They are my braces, I suppose, of course," said Scoutbush, who never understood a joke about himself, though he liked one about other people; while Elsley, who hated all jokes, made no answer—at least none worth recording. In fact, as the reader may have discovered, Elsley, save *tête-à-tête* with some one who took his fancy, was somewhat of a silent and morose animal, and, as little Scoutbush confided to Mellot, there was no getting a rise out of him. All which Lucia saw as keenly as any one, and tried to pass off by chattering nervously and fussily for him, as well as for herself; whereby she only made him the more cross, for he could not the least understand her argument—"Why, my dear, if you don't talk to people, I must!"

"But why should people be talked to?"

"Because they like it, and expect it!"

"The more foolish they. Much better to hold their tongues and think."

"Or read your poetry, I suppose?" And then would begin a squabble.

Meanwhile there was one, at least, of the party, who was watching Lucia with most deep and painful interest. Lord

Scoutbush was too busy with his own comforts, especially with his fishing, to think much of this moroseness of Elsley's. "If he suited Lucia, very well. His taste and hers differed: but it was her concern, not his"—was a very easy way of freeing himself from all anxiety on the matter: but not so with Major Campbell. He saw all this; and knew enough of human nature to suspect that the self-seeking which showed as moroseness in company, might show as downright bad temper in private. Longing to know more of Elsley, if possible, to guide and help him, he tried to be intimate with him, as he had tried at Aberalva; paid him court, asked his opinion, talked to him on all subjects which he thought would interest him. His conclusion was more favourable to Elsley's head than to his heart. He saw that Elsley was vain, and liked his attentions; and that lowered him in his eyes: but he saw too that Elsley shrank from him; at first he thought it pride, but he soon found that it was fear; and that lowered him still more in his eyes.

Perhaps Campbell was too hard on the poet: but his own purity itself told against Elsley. "Who am I, that any one should be afraid of me, unless they have done something wrong?" So, with his dark suspicions roused, he watched intently every word and every tone of Elsley's to his wife; and here he came to a more unpleasant conclusion still. He saw that they were, sometimes at least, not happy together; and from this he took for granted, too hastily, that they were never happy together; that Lucia was an utterly ill-used person; that Elsley was a bad fellow, who ill-treated her: and a black and awful indignation against the man grew up within him; all the more fierce because it seemed utterly righteous, and because, too, it had, under heavy penalties, to be utterly concealed beneath a courteous and genial manner: till many a time he felt inclined to knock Elsley down for little roughnesses to her, which were really the fruit of mere *gaucherie;* and then accused himself for a hypocrite, because he was keeping up the courtesies of life with such a man. For Campbell, like most men of his temperament, was over-stern, and sometimes a little cruel and unjust, in demanding of others the same lofty code which he had laid down for himself, and in demanding it, too, of some more than of others, by a very questionable exercise of private judgment. On the whole, he was right, no doubt, in being as indulgent as he dared to the publicans and sinners like Scoutbush; and in being as severe as he dared on all Pharisees, and pretentious persons whatsoever: but he was too much inclined to draw between the two classes one of those strong lines of demarcation which exist only in the fancies of the human brain; for sins, like all diseased matters, are complicated and confused matters; many a seeming Pharisee is at heart a self-

condemned publican, and ought to be comforted, and not cursed; while many a publican is, in the midst of all his foul sins, a thorough exclusive and self-complacent Pharisee, and needs not the right hand of mercy, but the strong arm of punishment.

Campbell, like other men, had his faults: and his were those of a man wrapped up in a pure and stately, but an austere and lonely creed, disgusted with the world in all its forms, and looking down upon men in general nearly as much as Thurnall did. So he set down Elsley for a bad man, to whom he was forced by hard circumstances to behave as if he were a good one.

The only way, therefore, in which he could vent his feeling, was by showing to Lucia that studied attention which sympathy and chivalry demand of a man toward an injured woman. Not that he dared, or wished, to conduct himself with her as he did with Valencia, even had she not been a married woman; he did not know her as intimately as he did her sister: but still he had a right to behave as the most intimate friend of her family, and he asserted that right; and all the more determinedly because Elsley seemed now and then not to like it. "I will teach him how to behave to a charming woman," said he to himself; and perhaps he had been wiser if he had not said it: but every man has his weak point, and chivalry was Major Campbell's.

"What do you think of that poet, Mellot?" said he once, on returning from a pic-nic, during which Elsley had never noticed his wife; and, at last, finding Valencia engaged with Headley, had actually gone off, *pour pis aller*, to watch Lord Scoutbush fishing.

"Oh, clever enough, and to spare; and as well read a man as I know. One of the Sturm-und-drang party, of course;—the express locomotive school, scream-and-go-ahead: and thinks me, with my classicism, a benighted pagan. Still, every man has a right to his opinion. Live and let live."

"I don't care about his taste," said the Major, impatiently. "What sort of man is he?—man, Claude?"

"Ahem, humph! 'Irritabile genus poetarum.' But one is so accustomed to that among literary men, one never expects them to be like anybody else, and so takes their whims and oddities for granted."

"And their sins too, eh?"

'Sins? I know of none on his part."

'Don't you call temper a sin?"

"No; I call it a determination of blood to the head, or of animal spirits to the wrong place, or—my dear Major, I am no moralist. I take people, you know, as I find them. But he is a bore; and I should not wonder if that sweet little woman had found it out ere now."

Campbell ground something between his teeth. He fancied

himself full of righteous wrath: he was really in a very unchristian temper. Be it so: perhaps there were excuses for him (as there are for many men), of which we know nothing.

Elsley, meanwhile, watched Campbell with fast lowering brow. Losing a woman's affections? He who does so deserves his fate. Had he been in the habit of paying proper attention to Lucia, he would have liked Campbell all the more for his conduct. There are few greater pleasures to a man who is what he should be to his wife, than to see other men admiring what he admires, and trying to rival him where he knows that he can have no rival. Let them worship as much as they will. Let her make herself as charming to them as she can. What matter? He smiles at them in his heart; for has he not, over and above all the pretty things which he can say and do ten times as well as they, a talisman—a dozen talismans which are beyond their reach?—in the strength of which he will go home and laugh over with her, amid sacred caresses, all which makes mean men mad? But Elsley, alas for him, had neglected Lucia himself, and therefore dreaded comparison with any other man; and the suspicions which had taken root in him at Aberalva grew into ugly shape and strength. However he was silent, and contented himself with coldness and all but rudeness.

There were excuses for him. In the first place, it would have been an ugly thing to take notice of any man's attentions to a wife; it could not be done but upon the strongest grounds, and done in a way which would make a complete rupture necessary, so breaking up the party in a sufficiently unpleasant way. Besides, to move in the matter at all would be to implicate Lucia; for, of whatsoever kind Campbell's attentions were, she evidently liked them; and a quarrel with her on that score was more than Elsley dared face. He was not a man of strong moral courage; he hated a scene of any kind; and he was afraid of being worsted in any really serious quarrel, not merely by Campbell, but by Lucia. It may seem strange that he should be afraid of her, though not so that he should be afraid of Campbell. But the truth is, that the man who bullies his wife very often does so—as Elsley had done more than once—simply to prove to himself his own strength, and hide his fear of her. He knew well that woman's tongue, when once the "fair beast" is brought to bay, is a weapon far too trenchant to be faced by any shield but that of a very clear conscience toward her; which was more than Elsley had.

Beside—and it is an honour to Elsley Vavasour, amid all his weakness, that he had justice and chivalry enough left to know what nine men out of ten ignore—behind all, let the worst come to the worst, lay one just and terrible rejoinder, which he, though

he had been no worse than the average of men, could only answer by silent shame,—

"At least, Sir, I was pure when I came to you! You best know whether you were so likewise."

And yet even that, so all-forgiving is woman, might have been faced by some means: but the miserable complication about the false name still remained. Elsley believed that he was in his wife's power; that she could, if she chose, turn upon him, and proclaim him to the world as a scoundrel and an impostor. And, as it is of the nature of man to hate those whom he fears, Elsley began to have dark and ugly feelings toward Lucia. Instead of throwing them away, as a strong man would have done, he pampered them almost without meaning to do so. For he let them run riot through his too vivid imagination, in the form of possible speeches, possible scenes, till he had looked and looked through a hundred thoughts which no man has a right to entertain for a moment. True; he had entertained them with horror; but he ought not to have entertained them at all; he ought to have kicked them contemptuously out and back to the devil, from whence they came. It may be again, that this is impossible to man; that prayer is the only refuge against that Walpurgis-dance of the witches and the fiends, which will, at hapless moments, whirl unbidden through a mortal brain: but Elsley did not pray.

So, leaving these fancies in his head too long, he soon became accustomed to them; and accustomed too, to the Nemesis which they bring with them, of chronic moodiness and concealed rage. Day by day he was lashing himself up into fresh fury, and yet day by day he was becoming more careful to conceal that fury. He had many reasons: moral cowardice, which made him shrink from the tremendous consequences of an explosion—equally tremendous, were he right or wrong. Then the secret hope, perhaps the secret consciousness, that he was wrong, and was only saying to God, like the self-deceiving prophet, "I do well to be angry;" then the honest fear of going too far; of being surprised at last into some hideous and irreparable speech or deed, which he might find out too late was utterly unjust: then at moments (for even that would cross him) the devilish notion, that, by concealment, he might lure Lucia on to give him a safe ground for attack. All these, and more, tormented him for a wretched fortnight, during which he became, at such an expense of self-control as he had not exercised for years, courteous to Campbell, more than courteous to Lucia; hiding under a smiling face, wrath which increased with the pressure brought to bear upon it.

Campbell and Lucia, Mellot, Valencia, and Frank, utterly deceived, went on more merrily than ever, little dreaming that they

walked and talked daily with a man who was fast becoming glad to flee to the pit of hell, but for the fear that "God would be there also."

They, meanwhile, chatted on, enjoying, as human souls are allowed to do at rare and precious moments, the mere sensation of being; of which they would talk at times in a way which led them down into deep matters: for instance,—

"How pleasant to sit here for ever!" said Claude, one afternoon, in the inn garden at Beddgelert, "and say, not with Descartes, 'I think, therefore I exist;' but simply, 'I enjoy, therefore I exist.' I almost think those Emersonians are right at times, when they crave the 'life of plants, and stones, and rain.' Stangrave said to me once, that his ideal of perfect bliss was that of an oyster in the Indian seas, drinking the warm salt water motionless, and troubling himself about nothing, while nothing troubled itself about him."

"Till a diver came and tore him up for the sake of his pearls?" said Valencia.

"He did not intend to contain any pearls. A pearl, you know, is a disease of the oyster, the product of some irritation. He wished to be the oyster pure and simple, a part of nature."

"And to be of no use?" asked Frank.

"Of none whatsoever. Nature had made him what he was, and all beside was her business, and not his. I don't deny that I laughed at him, and made him wroth by telling him that his doctrine was 'the apotheosis of loafing.' But my heart went with him, and the jolly oyster too. It is very beautiful after all, that careless nymph and shepherd life of the old Greeks, and that Marquesas romance of Herman Melville's—to enjoy the simple fact of living, like a Neapolitan lazzaroni, or a fly upon a wall."

"But the old Greek heroes fought and laboured to till the land, and rid it of giants and monsters," said Frank. "And as for the Marquesas, Mr. Melville found out, did he not—as you did once—that they were only petting and fattening him for the purpose of eating him? There is a dark side to that pretty picture, Mr. Mellot."

"*Tant pis pour eux!* But that is an unnecessary appendage to the idea, surely. It must be possible to realize such a simple, rich, healthy life, without wickedness, if not without human sorrow. It is no dream, and no one shall rob me of it. I have seen fragments of it scattered up and down the world; and I believe they will all meet in Paradise—where and when I care not; but they will meet. I was very happy in the South Sea Islands, after that, when nobody meant to eat me; and I am very happy here, and do not intend to be eaten, unless it will be any pleasure to Miss St. Just. No; let man enjoy himself when he

can, and take his fill of those flaming red geraniums, and glossy rhododenrons, and feathered crown-ferns, and the gold green lace of those acacias tossing and whispering overhead, and the purple mountains sleeping there aloft, and the murmur of the brook over the stones; and drink in scents with every breath,—what was his nose made for, save to smell? I used to torment myself once by asking them all what they meant. Now, I am content to have done with symbolisms, and say, 'What you all mean, I care not, all I know is, that I can draw pleasure from the mere sight of you, as, perhaps, you do from the mere sight of me; so let us sit together, Nature and I, and stare into each other's eyes like two young lovers, careless of the morrow and its griefs.' I will not even take the trouble to paint her. Why make ugly copies of perfect pictures? Let those who wish to see her take a railway ticket, and save us academicians colours and canvas. *Quant à moi*, the public must go to the mountains, as Mahomet had to do; for the mountains shall not come to the public."

"One of your wilful paradoxes, Mr. Mellott; why, you are photographing them all day long."

"Not quite all day long, Madam. And after all, *il faut vivre:* I want a few luxuries; I have no capacity for keeping a shop; photographing pays better than painting, considering the time it takes; and it is only Nature reproducing herself, not caricaturing her. But if any one will ensure me a poor two thousand a year, I will promise to photograph no more, but vanish to Sicily or Calabria, and sit with Sabina in an orchard all my days, twining rose garlands for her pretty head, like Theocritus and his friends, while the 'pears drop on our shoulders, and the apples by our side.'"

"What do you think of all this?" asked Valencia of Frank.

"That I am too like the Emersonian oyster here, very happy, and very useless; and, therefore, very anxious to be gone."

"Surely you have earned the right to be idle awhile?"

"No one has a right to be idle."

"Oh!" groaned Claude; "where did you find that eleventh commandment?"

"I have done with all eleventh commandments; for I find it quite hard work enough to keep the ancient ten. But I find it, Mellot, in the deepest abyss of all; in the very depth from which the commandments sprang. But we will not talk about it here."

"Why not?" asked Valencia, looking up. "Are we so very naughty as to be unworthy to listen?"

"And are these mountains," asked Claude, "so ugly and ill-made, that they are an unfit pulpit for a sermon? No; tell me what you mean. After all, I am half in jest."

"Do not courtesy, pity, chivalry, generosity, self-sacrifice,—in short, being of use,—do not our hearts tell us that they are the most beautiful, noble, lovely things in the world?"

"I suppose it is so," said Valencia.

"Why does one admire a soldier? Not for his epaulettes and red coat, but because one knows that, coxcomb though he be at home here, there is the power in him of that same self-sacrifice; that, when he is called, he will go and die, that he may be of use to his country. And yet—it may seem invidious to say so just now—but there other sorts of self-sacrifice, less showy, but even more beautiful."

"Oh, Mr. Headley, what can a man do more than die for his countrymen?"

"Live for them. It is a longer work, and therefore a more difficult and a nobler one."

Frank spoke in a somewhat sad and abstracted tone.

"But, tell me," she said, "what all this has to do with—with the deep matter of which you spoke?"

"Simply that it is the law of all earth, and heaven, and Him who made them.—That God is perfectly powerful, because He is perfectly and infinitely of use; and perfectly good, because He delights utterly and always in being of use; and that, therefore, we can become like God—as the very heathens felt that we can, and ought to become—only in proportion as we become of use. I did not see it once. I tried to be good, not knowing what good meant. I tried to be good, because I thought it would pay me in the world to come. But, at last, I saw that all life, all devotion, all piety, were only worth anything, only Divine, and God-like, and God-beloved, as they were means to that one end—to be of use."

"It is a noble thought, Headley," said Claude: but Valencia was silent.

"It is a noble thought, Mellot; and all thoughts become clear in the light of it; even that most difficult thought of all, which so often torments good people, when they feel, 'I ought to love God, and yet I do not love Him.' Easy to love Him, if one can once think of Him as the concentration, the ideal perfection, of all which is most noble, admirable, lovely in human character! And easy to work, too, when one once feels that one is working for such a Being, and with such a Being; as that! The whole world round us, and the future of the world too, seem full of light even down to its murkiest and foulest depths, when we can but remember that great idea,—An infinitely useful God over all, who is trying to make each of us useful in his place. If that be not the beatific vision of which old Mystics spoke so rapturously, one glimpse of which was perfect bliss, I at least

know none nobler, desire none more blessed. Pray forgive me Miss St. Just! I ought not to intrude thus!"

"Go on!" said Valencia.

"I—I really have no more to say. I have said too much. I do not know how I have been betrayed so far," stammered Frank, who had the just dislike of his school of anything like display on such solemn matters.

"Can you tell us too much truth? Mr. Headley is right, Mr. Mellot, and you are wrong."

"It will not be the first time, Miss St. Just. But what I spoke in jest, he has answered in earnest."

"He was quite right. We are none of us half earnest enough. There is Lucia with the children." And she rose and walked across the garden.

"You have moved the fair trifler somewhat," said Claude.

"God grant it! but I cannot think what made me."

"Why think? You spoke out nobly, and I shall not forget your sermon."

"I was not preaching at you, most affectionate and kindly of men."

"And laziest of men, likewise. What can I do now, at this moment, to be of use to any one? Set me my task."

But Frank was following with his eyes Valencia, as she went hurriedly across to Lucia. He saw her take two of the children at once off her sister's hands, and carry them away down a walk. A few minutes afterwards he could hear her romping with them; but he could not have guessed, from the silver din of those merry voices, that Valencia's heart was heavy within her.

For her conscience was really smitten. Of what use was she in the world? Major Campbell had talked to her often about her duties to this person and to that, of this same necessity of being useful; but she had escaped from the thought, as we have seen her, in laughing at poor little Scoutbush on the very same score. But why had not Major Campbell's sermons touched her heart as this one had? Who can tell? Who is there among us to whom an oft-heard truth has not become a tiresome and superfluous commonplace, till one day it has flashed before us utterly new, indubitable, not to be disobeyed, written in letters of fire across the whole vault of heaven? All one can say is, that her time was not come. Besides, she looked on Major Campbell as a being utterly superior to herself; and that very superiority, while it allowed her to be as familiar with him as she chose, excused her in her own eyes from opening to him her real heart. She could safely jest with him, let him pet her, play at being his daughter, while she felt that between him and her lay a gulf as wide as between earth and heaven; and that very notion com-

forted her in her naughtiness; for in that case, of course, his code of morals was not meant for her; and while she took his warnings (as many of them at least as she chose), she thought herself by no means bound to follow his examples. She all but worshipped him as her guardian angel: but she was not meant for an angel herself; so she could indulge freely in those little escapades and frivolities for which she was born, and then, whenever frightened, run for shelter under his wings. But to hear the same, and even loftier words, from the lips of the Curate, whom she had made her toy, almost her butt, was to have them brought down unexpectedly and painfully to her own level. If this was his ideal, why ought it not to be hers? Was she not his equal, perhaps his superior? And so her very pride humbled her, as she said to herself,—"Then I ought to be useful. I can be; will be!"

"Lucia," asked she, that very afternoon, "will you let me take the children off your hands while Clara is busy in the morning?"

"Oh, you dear good creature! but it would be such a *gêne!* They are really stupid, I am afraid, sometimes, or else I am. They make me so miserably cross at times."

"I will take them. It would be a relief to you, would it not?"

"My dear!" said poor Lucia, with a doleful smile, which seemed to Valencia's self-accusing heart to say, "Have you only now discovered that fact?"

From that day Valencia courted Headley's company more and more. To fall in love with him was of course absurd; and he had cured himself of his passing fancy for her. There could be no harm, then, in her making the most of conversation so different from what she heard in the world, and which in her heart of hearts she liked so much better. For it was with Valencia as with all women; in this common fault of frivolity, as in most others, the men rather than they are to blame. Valencia had cultivated in herself those qualities which she saw admired by the men whom she met, and some one of whom, of course, she meant to marry; and as their female ideal was a butterfly ideal, a butterfly she became. But beneath all lay, deep and strong, the woman's love of nobleness and wisdom, the woman's longing to learn and to be led, which has shown itself in every age in so many a fantastic and even ugly shape, and which is their real excuse for the flirting with "geniuses," casting themselves at the feet of directors; which had tempted her to coquette with Elsley, and was now bringing her into "undesirable" intimacy with the poor Curate.

She had heard that day, with some sorrow, his announcement

that he wished to be gone; but as he did not refer to it again, she left the thought alone, and all but forgot it. The subject, however, was renewed about a week afterwards. "When you return to Aberalva," she had said, in reference to some commission.

"I shall never return to Aberalva."

"Not return?"

"No; I have already resigned the curacy. I believe your uncle has appointed to it the man whom Campbell found for me: and an excellent man, I hear, he is. At least, he will do better there than I."

"But what could have induced you? How sorry all the people will be!"

"I am not sure of that," said he with a smile. "I did what I could at last to win back at least their respect, and to leave at least not hatred behind me: but I am unfit for them. I did not understand them. I meant—no matter what I meant; but I failed. God forgive me! I shall now go somewhere where I shall have simpler work to do; where I shall at least have a chance of practising the lesson which I learnt there. I learnt it all, strange to say, from the two people in the parish from whom I expected to learn least."

"Whom do you mean?"

"The doctor and the schoolmistress."

"Why from them less than from any in the parish? She so good, and he so clever?"

"That I shall never tell to any one now. Suffice it that I was mistaken."

Valencia could obtain no further answer; and so the days ran on, every one becoming more and more intimate, till a certain afternoon, on which they were all to go and pic-nic, under Claude's pilotage, above the lake of Gwynnant. Scoutbush was to have been with them; but a heavy day's rain in the meanwhile swelled the streams into fishing order; so the little man ordered a car, and started at three in the morning for Bettws with Mr. Bowie, who, however loth to give up the arrangement of plates and the extraction of champagne corks, considered his presence by the river-side a natural necessity.

"My dear Miss Clara, ye see, there'll be nobody to see that his lordship pits on dry stockings; and he's always getting over the tops of his water-boots, being young and daft, as we've all been, and no offence to you; and to tell you truth, I can stand all temptations—in moderation, that is,—save an' except the chance o' cleiking a fish."

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CHAPTER XX.

BOTH SIDES OF THE MOON AT ONCE.

THE spot which Claude had chosen for the pic-nic was on one of the lower spurs of that great mountain of The Maiden's Peak, which bounds the vale of Gwynnant to the south. Above, a wilderness of gnarled volcanic dykes, and purple heather ledges; below, broken into glens, in which still linger pale green ash-woods, relics of that great primæval forest in which, in Bess's days, great Leicester used to rouse the hart with hound and horn.

Among these Claude had found a little lawn, guarded by great rocks, out of every cranny of which the ashes grew as freely as on flat ground. Their feet were bedded deep in sweet fern and wild raspberries, and golden-rod, and purple scabious, and tall blue campanulas. Above them, and before them, and below them, the ashes shook their green filagree in the bright sunshine; and through them glimpses were seen of the purple cliffs above, and, right in front, of the great cataract of Nant Gwynnant, a long snow-white line zigzagging down coal-black cliffs for many a hundred feet, and above it, depth beyond depth of purple shadow away into the very heart of Snowdon, up the long valley of Cwm-dyli, to the great amphitheatre of Clogwyn-y-Garnedd; while over all the cone of Snowdon rose, in perfect symmetry, between his attendant peaks of Lliwedd and Crib Coch.

There they sat, and laughed, and talked, the pleasant summer afternoon, in their pleasant summer bower; and never regretted the silence of the birds, so sweetly did Valencia's song go up, in many a rich sad Irish melody; while the lowing of the milch kine, and the wild cooing of the herd-boys, came softly up from the vale below, "and all the air was filled with pleasant noise of waters."

Then Claude must needs photograph them all, as they sat, and group them first according to his fancy; and among his fancies was one, that Valencia should sit as queen, with Headley and the Major at her feet. And Headley lounged there, and looked into the grass, and thought it well for him could he lie there for ever.

Then Claude must photograph the mountain itself; and all began to talk of it.

"See the breadth of light and shadow," said Claude; "how the purple depth of the great lap of the mountain is thrown back by the sheet of green light on Lliwedd, and the red glory on the cliffs of Crib Coch, till you seem to look away into the bosom of the hill, mile after mile."

And so you do," said Headley. "I have learnt to distinguish mountain distances since I have been here. That peak is four miles from us now; and yet the shadowed cliffs at its foot seem double that distance."

"And look, look," said Valencia, "at the long line of glory with which the western sun is gilding the edge of the left hand slope, bringing it nearer and nearer to us every moment, against the deep blue sky!"

"But what a form! Perfect lightness, perfect symmetry!" said Claude. "Curve sweeping over curve, peak towering over peak, to the highest point, and then sinking down again as gracefully as they rose. One can hardly help fancying that the mountain moves; that those dancing lines are not instinct with life."

"At least," said Headley, "that the mountain is a leaping wave, frozen just ere it fell."

"Perfect," said Valencia. "That is the very expression! So concise, and yet so complete."

And Headley, poor fool, felt as happy as if he had found a gold mine.

"To me," said Elsley, "the fancy rises of some great Eastern monarch sitting in royal state; with ample shoulders sloping right and left, he lays his purple-mantled arms upon the heads of two of those Titan guards who stand on either side his footstool."

"While from beneath his throne," said Headley, "as Eastern poets would say, flow everlasting streams, life-giving, to fertilize broad lands below."

"I did not know that you, too, were a poet," said Valencia.

"Nor I, Madam. But if such scenes as these, and in such company, cannot inspire the fancy of even a poor country curate to something of exaltation, he must be dull indeed."

"Why not put some of these thoughts into poetry?"

"What use?" answered he in so low, sad, and meaning a tone, meant only for her ear, that Valencia looked down at him: but he was gazing intently upon the glorious scene. Was he hinting at the vanity and vexation of poor Elsley's versifying? Or did he mean that he had now no purpose in life,—no prize for which it was worth while to win honour?

She did not answer him: but he answered himself,—perhaps to explain away his own speech,—

"No, Madam! God has written the poetry already; and there it is before me. My business is not to re-write it clumsily, but to read it humbly, and give Him thanks for it."

More and more had Valencia been attracted by Headley, during the last few weeks Accustomed to men who tried to

make the greatest possible show of what small wits they possessed, she was surprised to find one who seemed to think it a duty to keep his knowledge and taste in the background. She gave him credit for more talent than appeared; for more, perhaps, than he really had. She was piqued, too, at his very modesty and self-restraint. Why did not he, like the rest who dangled about her, spread out his peacock's train for her eyes; and try to show his worship of her, by setting himself off in his brightest colours? And yet this modesty awed her into respect of him; for she could not forget that, whether he had sentiment much or little, sentiment was not the staple of his manhood: she could not forget his cholera work; and she knew that, under that delicate and bashful outside, lay virtue and heroism, enough and to spare.

"But, if you put these thoughts into words, you would teach others to read that poetry."

"My business is to teach people to do right; and if I cannot, to pray God to find some one who can."

"Right, Headley!" said Major Campbell, laying his hand on the Curate's shoulder. "God dwells no more in books written with pens than in temples made with hands; and the sacrifice which pleases Him is not verse, but righteousness. Do you recollect, Queen Whims, what I wrote once in your album?

> 'Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever,
> Do noble things, not dream them, all day long,
> So making life, death, and that vast forever,
> One grand, sweet song.'"

"But, you naughty, hypocritical Saint Père, you write poetry yourself, and beautifully."

"Yes, as I smoke my cigar, to comfort my poor rheumatic old soul. But if I lived only to write poetry, I should think myself as wise as if I lived only to smoke tobacco."

Valencia's eyes could not help glancing at Elsley, who had wandered away to the neighbouring brook, and was gazing with all his eyes upon a ferny rock, having left Lucia to help Claude with his photographing.

Frank saw her look, and read its meaning; and answered her thoughts, perhaps too hastily.

"And what a really well-read and agreeable man he is, all the while! What a mine of quaint learning, and beautiful old legend!—If he would but bring it into the common stock for every one's amusement, instead of hoarding it up for himself!"

"Why, what else does he do but bring it into the common stock, when he publishes a book which every one can read?" said Valencia, half out of the spirit of contradiction.

"And few understand," said Headley, quietly.

"You are very unjust; he is a very discerning and agreeable person, and I shall go and talk to him." And away went Valencia to Elsley, somewhat cross. Woman-like, she allowed, for the sake of her sister's honour, no one but herself to depreciate Vavasour, and chose to think it impertinent on Headley's part.

Headley began quietly talking to Major Campbell about botany, while Valencia, a little ashamed of herself all the while, took her revenge on Elsley by scolding him for his unsocial ways, in the very terms which Headley had been using.

At last Claude, having finished his photographing, departed downward to get some new view from the road below, and Lucia returned to the rest of the party. Valencia joined them at once, bringing up Elsley, who was not in the best of humours after her diatribes; and the whole party wandered about the woodland, and scrambled down beside the torrent beds.

At last they came to a point where they could descend no further; for the stream, falling over a cliff, had worn itself a narrow chasm in the rock, and thundered down it into a deep narrow pool.

Lucia, who was basking in the sunshine and the flowers as simply as a child, would needs peep over the brink, and made Elsley hold her while she looked down. A quiet happiness, as of old recollections, came into her eyes, as she watched the sparkling and foaming water—

> "And beauty, born of murmuring sound,
> Did pass into her face."

Campbell started. The Lucia of seven years ago seemed to bloom out again in that pale face and wrinkled forehead; and a smile came over his face, too, as he looked.

"Just like the dear old waterfall at Kilanbaggan. You recollect it, Major Campbell?"

Elsley always disliked recollections of Kilanbaggan; recollections of her life before he knew her; recollections of pleasures in which he had not shared; especially recollections of her old acquaintance with the Major.

"I do not, I am ashamed to say," replied the Major.

"Why, you were there a whole summer. Ah! I suppose you thought about nothing but your salmon fishing. If Elsley had been there he would not have forgotten a rock or a pool. Would you, Elsley?"

"Really, in spite of all salmon, I have not forgotten a rock or a pool about the place which I ever saw: but at the waterfall I never was."

"So he has not forgotten? What cause had he to remember so carefully?" thought Elsley.

"Oh, Elsley, look! What is that exquisite flower, like a ball of gold, hanging just over the water?"

If Elsley had not had the evil spirit haunting about him, he would have joined in Lucia's admiration of the beautiful creature, as it dropped into the foam from its narrow ledge, with its fan of palmate leaves bright green against the black mosses of the rock, and its golden petals glowing like a tiny sun in the darkness of the chasm: as it was, he answered—

"Only a buttercup."

"I am sure it's not a buttercup! It is three times as large, and a so much paler yellow! Is it a buttercup, now, Major Campbell?"

Campbell looked down.

"Very nearly one, after all: but its real name is the globe flower. It is common enough here in spring; you may see the leaves in every pasture. But I suppose this plant, hidden from the light, has kept its flowers till the autumn."

"And till I came to see it, darling that it is! I should like to reward it by wearing it home."

"I dare say it would be very proud of the honour; especially if Mr. Vavasour would embalm it in verse, after it had done service to you."

"It is doing good enough service where it is," said Elsley. "Why pluck out the very eye of that perfect picture?"

"Strange," said Lucia, "that such a beautiful thing should be born there all alone upon these rocks, with no one to look at it."

"It enjoys itself sufficiently without us, no doubt," said Elsley.

"Yes; but I want to enjoy it. Oh, if you could but get it for me!"

Elsley looked down. There was fifteen feet of somewhat slippery rock; then a ragged ledge a foot broad, in a crack of which the flower grew; then the dark boiling pool. Elsley shrugged his shoulders, and said, smiling, as if it were a fine thing to say—"Really, my dear, all men are not knight errants enough to endanger their necks for a bit of weed; and I cannot say that such rough *tours de force* are at all to my fancy."

Lucia turned away: but she was vexed. Campbell could see that a strange fancy for the plant had seized her. As she walked from the spot, he could hear her talking about its beauty to Valencia.

Campbell's blood boiled. To be asked by that woman—by any woman—to get her that flower: and to be afraid! It was bad enough to be ill-tempered; but to be a coward, and to be proud thereof! He yielded to a temptation, which he had much better have left alone, seeing that Lucia had not asked him;

swung himself easily enough down the ledge; got the flower, and put it, quietly bowing, into Mrs. Vavasour's hand.

He was frightened when he had done it; for he saw, to his surprise, that she was frightened. She took the flower, smiling thanks, and expressing a little common-place horror and astonishment at his having gone down such a dangerous cliff: but she took it to Elsley, drew his arm through hers, and seemed determined to make as much of him as possible for the rest of the afternoon. "The fellow was jealous, then, in addition to his other sins!" And Campbell, who felt that he had put himself unnecessarily forward between husband and wife, grew more and more angry; and somehow, unlike his usual wont, refused to confess himself in the wrong, because he was in the wrong. Certainly it was not pleasant for poor Elsley; and so Lucia felt, and bore with him when he refused to be comforted, and rendered blessing for railing when he said to her more than one angry word; but she had been accustomed to angry words by this time.

All might have passed off, but for that careless Valencia, who had not seen the details of what had passed; and so advised herself to ask where Lucia got that beautiful plant?

"Major Campbell picked it up for her from the cliff," said Elsley, drily.

"Ah? at the risk of his neck, I don't doubt. He is the most matchless *cavalier servente*."

"I shall leave Mrs. Vavasour to his care, then—that is, for the present," said Elsley, drawing his arm from Lucia's.

"I assure you," answered she, roused in her turn by his determined bad temper, "I am not the least afraid of being left in the charge of so old a friend."

Elsley made no answer, but sprang down through the thickets, calling loudly to Claude Mellot.

It was very naughty of Lucia, no doubt: but even a worm will turn; and there are times when people who have not courage to hold their peace must say something or other; and do not always, in the hurry, get out what they ought, but only what they have time to think of. And she forgot what she had said the next minute, in Major Campell's question—

"Am I, then, so old a friend, Mrs. Vavasour?"

"Of course; who older?"

Campbell was silent a moment. If he was inclined to choke, at least Lucia did not see it.

"I trust I have not offended your—Mr. Vavasour?"

"Oh!" she said, with a forced gaiety, "only one of his poetic fancies. He wanted so much to see Mr. Mellot photograph the waterfall. I hope he will be in time to find him."

"I am a plain soldier, Mrs. Vavasour, and I only ask because I do not understand. What are poetic fancies?"

Lucia looked up in his face puzzled, and saw there an expression so grave, pitying, tender, that her heart leaped up toward him, and then sank back again.

"Why do you ask? Why need you know? You are no poet."

"And for that very cause I asked you."

"Oh, but," said she, guessing at what was in his mind, and trying, woman-like, to play purposely at cross purposes, and to defend her husband at all risks; "he has an extraordinary poetic faculty; all the world agrees to that, Major Campbell."

"What matter?" said he. Lucia would have been very angry, and perhaps ought to have been so; for what business of Campbell's was it whether her husband were kind to her or not? But there was a deep sadness, almost despair, in the tone, which disarmed her.

"Oh, Major Campbell, is it not a glorious thing to be a poet? And it is not a glorious thing to be a poet's wife? Oh, for the sake of that—if I could but see him honoured, appreciated, famous, as he will be some day! Though I think" (and she spoke with all a woman's pride) "he is somewhat famous now, is he not?"

"Famous? Yes," answered Campbell, with an abstracted voice, and then rejoined quickly, "If you could but see that, what then?"

"Why then," said she, with a half smile (for she had nearly entrapped herself into an admission of what she was determined to conceal)—"why then, I should be still more what I am now, his devoted little wife, who cares for nobody and nothing but putting his study to rights, and bringing up his children."

"Happy children!" said he, after a pause, and half to himself, "who have such a mother to bring them up."

"Do you really think so? But flattery used not to be one of your sins. Ah, I wish you could give me some advice about how I am to teach them."

"So it is she who has the work of education, not he!" thought Campbell to himself; and then answered gaily,—

"My dear Madam, what can a confirmed old bachelor like me know about children?"

"Oh, don't you know" (and she gave one of her pretty Irish laughs) "that it is the old maids who always write the children's books, for the benefit of us poor ignorant married women? But" (and she spoke earnestly again) "we all know how wise and good you are. I did not know it in old times. I am afraid I used to torment you when I was young and foolish."

"Where on earth can Mellot and Mr. Vavasour be?" asked Campbell.

"Oh, never mind; Mr. Mellot has gone wandering down the glen with his apparatus, and my Elsley has gone wandering after him, and will find him in due time, with his head in a black bag, and a great bull just going to charge him from behind, like that hapless man in 'Punch.' I always tell Mr. Mellot that will be his end."

Campbell was deeply shocked to hear the light tone in which she talked of the passionate temper of a man whom she so surely loved. How many outbursts of it there must have been; how many paroxysms of astonishment, shame, grief,—perhaps, alas! counterbursts of anger—ere that heart could have become thus proof against the ever-lowering thunderstorm!

"Well," he said, "all we can do is to walk down to the car, and let them follow; and, meanwhile, I will give you my wise opinion about this education question, whereof I know nothing."

"It will be all oracular to me, for I know nothing either;" and she put her arm through his, and walked on.

"Did you hurt yourself then? I am sure you are in pain."

"I? Never less free from it, with many thanks to you. What made you think so?"

"I heard you breathe so hard, and quite stamp your feet, I thought. I suppose it was fancy."

It was not fancy, nevertheless. Major Campbell was stamping down something; and succeeded too in crushing it.

They walked on toward the car, Valencia and Headley following them: ere they arrived at the place where they were to meet it, it was quite dark: but what was more important, the car was not there.

"The stupid man must have mistaken his orders, and gone home."

"Or let his horse go home of itself, while he was asleep inside. He was more than half tipsy when we started."

So spoke the Major, divining the exact truth. There was nothing to be done but to walk the four miles home, and let the two truants follow as they could.

"We shall have plenty of time for our educational lecture," said Lucia.

"Plenty of time to waste, then, my dear lady."

"Oh, I never talk with you five minutes—I do not know why—without feeling wiser and happier. I envy Valencia for having seen so much of you of late."

Little thought poor Lucia, as she spoke those innocent words, that within four yards of her, crouched behind the wall, his face

and every limb writhing with mingled curiosity and rage, was none other but her husband.

He had given place to the devil: and the devil (for the "superstitious" and "old-world" notion which attributes such frenzies to the devil has not yet been superseded by a better one) had entered into him, and concentrated all the evil habits and passions which he had indulged for years into one flaming hell within him.

Miserable man! His torments were sevenfold: and if he had sinned, he was at least punished. Not merely by all which a husband has a right to feel in such a case, or fancies that he has a right; not merely by tortured vanity and self-conceit, by the agony of seeing any man preferred to him, which to a man of Elsley's character was of itself unbearable;—not merely by the loss of trust in one whom he had once trusted utterly:—but, over and above all, and worst of all, by the feeling of shame, self-reproach, self-hatred, which haunts a jealous man, and which ought to haunt him; for few men lose the love of women who have once loved them, save by their own folly or baseness:—by the recollection that he had traded on her trust; that he had drugged his own conscience with the fancy that she must love him always, let him do what he would; and had neglected and insulted her affection, because he fancied, in his conceit, that it was inalienable. And with the loss of self-respect, came recklessness of it, and drove him on, as it has jealous men in all ages, to meannesses unspeakable, which have made them for centuries, poor wretches, the butts of worthless play-wrights, and the scorn of their fellow-men.

Elsley had wandered, he hardly knew how or whither, for his calling to Mellot was the merest blind,—stumbling over rocks, bruising himself against tree-trunks, to this wall. He knew they must pass it. He waited for them, and had his reward. Blind with rage, he hardly waited for the sound of their footsteps to die away, before he had sprung into the road, and hurried up in the opposite direction,—any where, every where,—to escape from them, and from self. Whipt by the furies, he fled along the road and up the vale, he cared not whither.

And what were Headley and Valencia, who of necessity had paired off together, doing all the while?

They walked on silently side by side for ten minutes; then Frank said,—

"I have been impertinent, Miss St. Just, and I beg your pardon."

"No, you have not," said she, quite hastily. "You were right, too right,—has it not been proved within the last five minutes? My poor sister! What can be done to mend Mr.

Vavasour's temper? I wish you could talk to him, Mr. Headley."

"He is beyond my art. His age, and his talents, and his —his consciousness of them," said Frank, using the mildest term he could find, "would prevent so insignificant a person as me having any influence. But what I cannot do, God's grace may."

"Can it change a man's character, Mr. Headley? It may make good men better—but can it cure temper?"

"Major Campbell must have told you that it can do anything."

"Ah, yes: with men as wise, and strong, and noble as he is; but with such a weak, vain man—"

"Miss St. Just, I know one who is neither wise, nor strong, nor noble: but as weak and vain as any man; in whom God has conquered—as He may conquer yet in Mr. Vavasour—all which makes man cling to life."

"What, all?" asked she, suspecting, and not wrongly, that he spoke of himself.

"All, I suppose, which it is good for them to have crushed. There are feelings which last on, in spite of all struggles to quench them—I suppose, because they ought to last; because, while they torture, they still ennoble. Death will quench them: or if not, satisfy them: or if not, set them at rest somehow."

"Death?" answered she, in a startled tone.

"Yes. Our friend, Major Campbell's friend, Death. We have been seeing a good deal of him together lately, and have come to the conclusion that he is the most useful, pleasant, and instructive of all friends."

"Oh, Mr. Headley, do not speak so! Are you in earnest?"

"So much in earnest, that I have resolved to go out as an army chaplain, to see in the war somewhat more of my new friend."

"Impossible! Mr. Headley; it will kill you!—All that horrible fever and cholera!"

"And what possible harm can it do me, if it does kill me, Miss St. Just!"

"Mr. Headley, this is madness! I—we cannot allow you to throw away your life thus—so young, and—and such prospects before you! And there is nothing that my brother would not do for you, were it only for your heroism at Aberalva. There is not one of the family who does not love and respect you, and long to see all the world appreciating you as we do; and your poor mother—"

"I have told my mother all, Miss St. Just. And she has

said, Go; it is your only hope.' She has other sons to comfort her. Let us say no more of it. Had I thought that you would have disapproved of it, I would never have mentioned the thing."

"Disapprove of—your going to die? You shall not! And for me, too: for I guess all—all is my fault!"

"All is mine," said he quietly: "who was fool enough to fancy that I could forget you—conquer my love for you;" and at these words his whole voice and manner changed in an instant into wildest passion. "I must speak—now and never more—I love you still, fool that I am! Would God I had never seen you! No, not that. Thank God for that to the last: but would God I had died of that cholera! that I had never come here, conceited fool that I was, fancying that it was possible, after having once— No! Let me go, go any where, where I may burden you no more with my absurd dreams!—You, who have had the same thing said to you, and in finer words, a hundred times, by men who would not deign to speak to me!" and covering his face in his hands, he strode on, as if to escape.

"I never had the same thing said to me!"

"Never? How often have fine gentlemen, noblemen, sworn that they were dying for you?"

"They never have said to me what you have done."

"No—I am clumsy, I suppose—"

"Mr. Headley, indeed you are unjust to yourself—unjust to me!"

"I—to you? Never! I know you better than you know yourself—see in you what no one else sees. Oh, what fools they are who say that love is blind! Blind? He sees souls with God's own light; not as they have become: but as they ought to become—can become—are already in the sight of Him who made them!"

"And what might I become?" asked she, half-frightened by the new earnestness of his utterance.

"How can I tell? Something infinitely too high for me, at least, who even now am not worthy to kiss the dust off your feet."

"Oh, do not speak so: little do you know—! No, Mr. Headley, it is you who are too good for me; too noble, single-eyed, self-sacrificing, to endure my vanity and meanness for a day."

"Madam, do not speak thus! Give me no word which my folly can distort into a ray of hope, unless you wish to drive me mad. No! it is impossible; and, were it possible, what but ruin to my soul? I should live for you, and not for my work. I should become a schemer, ambitious, intriguing, in the vain hope

of proving myself to the world worthy of you. No; let it be 'Let the dead bury their dead, and follow thou me.'"

She made no answer—what answer was there to make? And he strode on by her side in silence for full ten minutes. At last she was forced to speak.

"Mr. Headley, recollect that this conversation has gone too far for us to avoid coming to some definite understanding—"

"Then it shall, Miss St. Just. Then it shall, once and for all: formally and deliberately, it shall end now. Suppose,—I only say suppose,—that I could, without failing in my own honour, my duty to my calling, make myself such a name among good men that, poor parson though I be, your family need be ashamed of nothing about me, save my poverty? Tell me, now and for ever, could it be possible—"

He stopped. She walked on, silent, in her turn.

"Say no, as a matter of course, and end it!" said he, bitterly

She drew a long breath, as if heaving off a weight.

"I cannot—dare not say it."

"It? Which of the two? yes, or no?"

She was silent.

He stopped, and spoke calmly and slowly. "Say that again, and tell me that I am not dreaming. You? the admired! the worshipped! the luxurious!—and no blame to you that you are what you were born—could you endure a little parsonage, the teaching village school-children, tending dirty old women, and petty cares the whole year round?"

"Mr. Headley," answered she, slowly and calmly, in her turn, "I could endure a cottage,—a prison, I fancy, at moments,—to escape from this world, of which I am tired, which will soon be tired of me; from women who envy me, impute to me ambitions as base as their own; from men who admire—not me, for they do not know me, and never will—but what in me—I hate them!—will give them pleasure. I hate it all, despise it all; despise myself for it all every morning when I wake! What does it do for me, but rouse in me the very parts of my own character which are most despicable, most tormenting? If it goes on, I feel I could become as frivolous, as mean, aye, as wicked as the worst. You do not know—you do not know—. I have envied the nuns their convents. I have envied Selkirk his desert island. I envy now the milkmaids there below: anything to escape and be in earnest, anything for some one to teach me to be of use! Yes, this cholera—and this war—though only, only its coming shadow has passed over me,—and your words too"—cried she, and stopped and hesitated, as if afraid to tell too much—"they have wakened me—to a new life—at least to the dream of a new life!"

"Have you not Major Campbell?" said Headley, with a terrible effort of will.

"Yes—but has he taught me? He is dear, and good, and wise; but he is too wise, too great for me. He plays with me as a lion might with a mouse; he is like a grand angel far above in another planet, who can pity and advise, but who cannot—What am I saying?" and she covered her face with her hand.

She dropped her glove as she did so. Headley picked it up and gave it to her: as he did so their hands met; and their hands did not part again.

"You know that I love you, Valencia St. Just."

"Too well! too well!"

"But you know, too, that you do not love me."

"Who told you so? What do you know? What do I know? Only that I long for some one to make me—to make me as good as you are!" And she burst into tears.

"Valencia, will you trust me?"

"Yes!" cried she, looking up at him suddenly: "if you will not go to the war."

"No—no—no! Would you have me turn traitor and coward to God; and now, of all moments in my life?"

"Noble creature!" said she; "you will make me love you whether I wish or not."

What was it, after all, by which Frank Headley won Valencia's love? I cannot tell. Can you tell, Sir, how you won the love of your wife? As little as you can tell of that still greater miracle—how you have kept her love since she found out what manner of man you were.

So they paced homeward, hand in hand, beside the shining ripples, along the Dinas shore. The birches breathed fragrance on them; the night-hawk churred softly round their path; the stately mountains smiled above them in the moonlight, and seemed to keep watch and ward over their love, and to shut out the noisy world, and the harsh babble and vain fashions of the town. The summer lightning flickered to the westward; but round them the rich soft night seemed full of love,—as full of love as their own hearts were, and, like them, brooding silently upon its joy. At last the walk was over; the kind moon sank low behind the hills; and the darkness hid their blushes as they paced into the sleeping village, and their hands parted unwillingly at last.

When they came into the hall, through the group of lounging gownsmen and tourists, they found Bowie arguing with Mrs. Lewis, in his dogmatic Scotch way,—

"So ye see, Madam, there's no use defending the drunken loon any more at all; and here will my leddies have just walked their

bonny legs off, all through that carnal sin of drunkenness, which is the curse of your Welsh populaaation."

"And not quite unknown north of Tweed either, Bowie," said Valencia, laughing. "There now, say no more about it. We have had a delightful walk, and nobody is the least tired. Don't say any more, Mrs. Lewis: but tell them to get us some supper. Bowie, so my Lord has come in?"

"This half-hour good!"

"Has he had any sport?"

"Sport! aye, troth! Five fish in the day. That's a river indeed at Bettws! Not a pawky wee burn, like this Aberglaslyn thing."

"Only five fish?" said Valencia, in a frightened tone.

"Fish, my leddy, not trouts, I said. I thought ye knew better than that by this time."

"Oh, salmon?" cried Valencia, relieved. "Delightful. I'll go to him this moment."

And upstairs to Scoutbush's room she went.

He was sitting in dressing-gown and slippers, sipping his claret, and fondling his fly-book (the only one he ever studied *con amore*), with a most complacent face. She came in and stood demurely before him, holding her broad hat in both hands before her knees, like a school-girl, her face half-hidden in the black curls. Scoutbush looked up and smiled affectionately, as he caught the light of her eyes and the arch play of her lips.

"Ah! there you are, at a pretty time of night! How beautiful you look, Val! I wish my wife may be half as pretty!"

Valencia made him a prim curtsey.

"I am delighted to hear of my Lord's good sport. He will choose to be in a good humour, I suppose."

"Good humour? *ça va sans dire!* Three stone of fish in three hours!"

"Then his little sister is going to do a very foolish thing, and wants his leave to do it; which if he will grant, she will let him do as many foolish things as he likes without scolding him, as long as they both shall live."

"Do it then, I beg. What is it? Do you want to go up Snowdon with Headley to-morrow, to see the sun rise? You'll kill yourself!"

"No," said Valencia very quietly; "I only want to marry him."

"Marry him!" cried Scoutbush, starting up.

"Don't try to look majestic, my dear little brother, for you are really not tall enough; as it is, you have only hooked all your flies into your dressing-gown."

Scoutbush dashed himself down into his chair again.

"I'll be shot if you shall!"

"You may be shot just as surely, whether I do or not," said she softly; and she knelt down before him, and put her arms round him, and laid her head upon his lap. "There, you can't run away now; so you must hear me quietly. And you know it may not be often that we shall be together again thus; and oh, Scoutbush! brother! if anything was to happen to you—I only say if—in this horrid war, you would not like to think that you had refused the last thing your little Val asked for, and that she was miserable and lonely at home."

"I'll be shot if you shall!" was all the poor Viscount could get out.

"Yes, miserable and lonely: you gone away, and mon Saint Père too: and Lucia, she has her children—and I am so wild and weak—I must have some one to guide me and protect me—indeed I must!"

"Why, that was what I always said! That was why I wanted you so to marry this season! Why did not you take Chalkclere, or half-a-dozen good matches who were dying for you, and not this confounded black parson, of all birds in the air?"

"I did not take Lord Chalkclere for the very reason that I do take Mr. Headley. I want a husband who will guide me, not one whom I must guide."

"Guide?" said Scoutbush bitterly, with one of those little sparks of practical shrewdness which sometimes fell from him. "Aye, I see how it is! These intriguing rascals of parsons—they begin as father confessors, like so many popish priests; and one fine morning they blossom out into lovers, and so they get all the pretty women, and all the good fortunes,—the sneaking, ambitious, low-bred—"

"He is neither! You are unjust, Scoutbush!" cried Valencia, looking up. "He is the very soul of honour. He might be rich now, and have had a fine living, if he had not been too conscientious to let his uncle buy him one; and that offended his uncle, and he would allow him nothing. And as for being low-bred, he is a gentleman, as you know; and if his uncle be in business, his mother is a lady, and he will be well enough off one day."

"You seem to know a great deal about his affairs."

"He told me all, months ago—before there was any dream of this. And, my dear," she went on, relapsing into her usual arch tone, "there is no fear but his uncle will be glad enough to patronise him again, when he finds that he has married a viscount's sister."

Scoutbush laughed. "You scheming little Irish rogue! But I won't! I've said it, and I won't. It's enough to have one sister married to a poor poet, without having another married to a poor parson. Oh! what have I done that I should be bothered in this way? Isn't it bad enough to be a landlord, and to have an estate, and be responsible for a lot of people that will die of the cholera, and have to vote in the house about a lot of things I don't understand, nor anybody else, I believe, but that, over and above, I must be the head of the family, and answerable to all the world for whom my mad sisters marry? I won't, I say!"

"Then I shall just go and marry without your leave! I'm of age, you know, and my fortune's my own; and then we shall come in as the runaway couples do in a play, while you sit there in your dressing-gown as the stern father—Won't you borrow a white wig for the occasion, my Lord?—And we shall fall down on our knees so,"—and she put herself in the prettiest attitude in the world,—"and beg your blessing—please forgive us this time, and we'll never do so any more! And then you will turn your face away, like the baron in the ballad,—

'And brushed away the springing tear
He proudly strove to hide,'

Et cetera, et cetera—Finish the scene for yourself, with a—'Bless ye, my children; bless ye!'"

"Go along, and marry the cat if you like! You are mad; and I am mad; and all the world's mad, I think."

"There," she said, "I knew that he would be a good boy at last!" And she sprang up, threw her arms round his neck, and, to his great astonishment, burst into the most violent fit of crying.

"Good gracious, Valencia! do be reasonable! You'll go into a fit, or somebody will hear you! You know how I hate a scene. Do be good, there's a darling! Why didn't you tell me at first how much you wished for it, and I would have said yes in a moment."

"Because I didn't know myself," cried she passionately. "There, I will be good, and love you better than all the world, except one. And if you let those horrid Russians hurt you, I will hate you as long as I live, and be miserable all my life afterwards."

"Why, Valencia, do you know, that sounds very like a bull?"

"Am I not a wild Irish girl?" said she, and hurried out, leaving Scoutbush to return to his flies.

She bounded into Lucia's room, there to pour out a bursting heart—and stopped short.

Lucia was sitting on the bed, her shawl and bonnet tossed

upon the floor, her head sunk on her bosom, her arms sunk by her side.

"Lucia, what is it? Speak to me, Lucia!"

She pointed faintly to a letter on the floor—Valencia caught it up—Lucia made a gesture as if to stop her.

"No, you must not read it. Too dreadful!"

But Valencia read it; while Lucia covered her face in her hands, and uttered a long, low, shuddering moan of bitter agony.

Valencia read, with flashing eyes and bursting brow. It was a hideous letter. The words of a man trying to supply the place of strength by virulence. A hideous letter, unfit to be written here.

"Valencia! Valencia! It is false—a mistake—he is dreaming. You know it is false! You will not leave me too?"

Valencia dashed it on the ground, clasped her sister in her arms, and covered her head with kisses.

"My Lucia! My own sweet good sister! Base, cowardly," sobbed she, in her rage; while Lucia's agony began to find a vent in words, and she moaned on—

"What have I done? All that flower, that horrid flower: but who would have dreamed—and Major Campbell, too, of all men upon earth? Valencia, it is some horrid delusion of the devil. Why, he was there all the while—and you too. Could he think that I should before his very face? What must he fancy me? Oh, it is a delusion of the devil, and nothing else!"

"He is a wretch! I will take the letter to my brother; he shall right you!"

"Ah no! no! never! Let me tear it to atoms—hide it! It is all a mistake! He did not mean it! He will recollect himself to-morrow and come back."

"Let him come back if he dare!" cried Valencia, in a tone which said, "I could kill him with my own hands!"

"Oh, he will come back! He cannot have the heart to leave his poor little Lucia. Oh, cruel, cowardly, not to have said one word—not one word to explain all—but it was all my fault, my wicked, odious temper; and after I had seen how vexed he was, too!—Oh, Elsley, Elsley, come back, only come back, and I will beg your pardon on my knees! any thing! Scold me, beat me, if you will! I deserve it all! Only come back, and let me see your face, and hear your voice, instead of leaving me here all alone, and the poor children too! Oh, what shall I say to them to-morrow, when they wake and find no father?"

Valencia's indignation had no words. She could only sit on the bed, with Lucia in her arms, looking defiance at all the world above that fair head which one moment dropped on her

bosom, and the next gazed up into her face in pitiful child-like pleading.

"Oh, if I but knew where he was gone! If I could but find him! One word—one word would set all right! It always did, Valentia, always! He was so kind, so dear in a moment, when I put away my naughty, naughty temper, and smiled in his face like a good wife. Wicked creature that I was! and this is my punishment. Oh, Elsley, one word, one word! I must find him if I went barefoot over the mountains—I must go, I must—"

And she tried to rise: but Valencia held her down, while she entreated piteously—

"I will go, and see about finding him!" she said at last, as her only resource. "Promise me to be quiet here, and I will."

"Quiet? Yes! quiet here!" and she threw herself upon her face on the floor.

She looked up eagerly. "You will not tell Scoutbush?"

"Why not?"

"He is so—so hasty. He will kill him! Valencia, he will kill him! Promise me not to tell him, or I shall go mad!" And she sat up again, pressing her hands upon her head, and rocking from side to side.

"Oh, Valencia, if I dared only scream! but keeping it in kills me. It is like a sword through my brain now!"

"Let me call Clara."

"No, no! not Clara. Do not tell her. I will be quiet; indeed I will; only come back soon, soon; for I am all alone, alone!" And she threw herself down again upon her face.

Valencia went out. Certain as she was of her sister's innocence, there was one terrible question in her heart which must be answered, or her belief in all truth, goodness, religion, would reel and rock to its very foundations. And till she had an answer to that, she could not sit still by Lucia.

She walked hurriedly, with compressed lips, but quivering limbs, down stairs, and into the sitting-room. Scoutbush was gone to bed. Campbell and Mellot sat chatting still.

"Where is my brother?"

"Gone to bed, as some one else ought to be; for it is past twelve. Is Vavasour come in yet?"

"No."

"Very odd," said Claude; "I never saw him after I left you."

"He said certainly that he was going to find you," said Campbell.

"There is no need for speculating," said Valencia quietly; "my sister has a note from Mr. Vavasour at Pen-y-gwryd."

"Pen-y-gwryd?" cried both men at once.

"Yes. Major Campbell, I wish to show it to you."

Valencia's tone and manner was significant enough to make Claude Mellot bid them both good-night.

When he had shut the door behind him, Valencia put the letter into the Major's hand.

He was too much absorbed in it to look up at her; but if he had done so, he would have been startled by the fearful capacity of passion which changed, for the moment, that gay Queen Whims into a terrible Roxana, as she stood, leaning against the mantel-piece, but drawn up to her full height, her lips tight shut, eyes which gazed through and through him in awful scrutiny, holding her very breath, while a nervous clutching of the little hand said, "If you have tampered with my sister's heart, better for you that you were dead!"

He read it through, once, twice, with livid face; then dashed it on the floor.

"Fool!—cur!—liar!—she is as pure as God's sunlight."

"You need not tell me that," said Valencia, through her closed teeth.

"Fool!—fool!" And then, in a moment, his voice changed from indignation to the bitterest self-reproach. "And fool I; thrice fool! Who am I, to rail on him? Oh God! what have I done?" And he covered his face with his hands.

"What have you done?" literally shrieked Valencia.

"Nothing that you or man can blame, Miss St. Just! Can you dream that, sinful as I am, I could ever harbour a thought toward her of which I should be ashamed before the angels of God?"

He looked up as he spoke, with an utter humility and an intense honesty, which unnerved her at once.

"Oh, my Saint Père!" and she held out both her hands. "Forgive me, if—only for a moment—"

"I am not your Saint Père, nor any one's! I am a poor, weak, conceited, miserable man, who by his accursed impertinence has broken the heart of the being whom he loves best on earth."

Valencia started: but ere she could ask for an explanation, he rejoined wildly—

"How is she? Tell me only that, this once! Has it killed her? Does she hate him?"

"Adores him more than ever. Oh, Major Campbell! it is too piteous, too piteous."

He covered his face with his hands, shuddering. "Thank God! yes, thank God! So it should be. Let her love him to the last, and win her martyr's crown! Now, Valencia St. Just.

sit down, if but for five minutes; and listen, once for all, to the last words, perhaps, you will ever hear me speak; unless she wants you?—"

"No, no! Tell me all, Saint Père!" said Valencia, "for I am walking in a dream—a double dream!" as the new thought of Headley, and that walk, came over her. "Tell me all at once, while I have wits left to comprehend."

"Miss St. Just," said he, in a clear calm voice. "It is fit, for her honour and for mine, that you should know all. The first day that I ever saw your sister, I loved her; as a man loves who can never cease to love, or love a second time. I was a raw, awkward Scotchman then, and she used to laugh at me. Why not? I kept my secret, and determined to become a man at whom no one would wish to laugh. I was in the Company's service then. You recollect her jesting once about the Indian army, and my commanding black people, and saying that the Line only was fit for—some girl's jest?"

"No; I recollect nothing of it."

"I never forgot it. I threw up all my prospects, and went into the Line. Whether I won honour there or not, I need not tell you. I came back to England years after, not unworthy, as I fancied, to look your sister in the face as an equal. I found her married."

He paused a little, and then went on, in a quiet, business-like tone.

"Good. Her choice was sure to be a worthy one, and that was enough for me. You need not doubt that I kept my secret then more sacredly than ever. I returned to India, and tried to die. I dared not kill myself, for I was a soldier and a Christian, and belonged to God and my Queen. The Sikhs would not kill me, do what I would to help them. Then I threw myself into science, that I might stifle passion; and I stifled it. I fancied myself cured, and I was cured; and I returned to England again. I loved your brother for her sake; I loved you at first for her sake, then for your own. But I presumed upon my cure; I accepted your brother's invitation; I caught at the opportunity of seeing her again—happy—as I fancied; and of proving to myself my own soundness. I considered myself a sort of Melchisedek, neither young nor old, without passions, without purpose on earth—a fakeer who had licence to do and to dare what others might not. But I kept my secret proudly inviolate. I do not believe at this moment she dreams that—Do you?"

"She does not."

"Thank God! I was a most conceited fool, puffed up with spiritual pride, tempting God needlessly. I went, I saw her. Heaven is my witness, that as far as passion goes, my heart is as

pure as yours: but I found that I still cared more for her than for any being on earth: and I found too the sort of man upon whom—God forgive me! I must not talk of that—I despised him, hated him, pretended to teach him his duty, by behaving better to her than he did—the spiritual coxcomb that I was! What business had I with it? Why not have left all to God and her good sense? The devil tempted me to-day, in the shape of an angel of courtesy and chivalry; and here the end is come. I must find that man, Miss St. Just, if I travel the world in search of him. I must ask his pardon frankly, humbly, for my impertinence. Perhaps so I may bring him back to her, and not die with a curse on my head for having parted those whom God has joined. And then to the old fighting-trade once more—the only one, I believe, I really understand; and see whether a Russian bullet will not fly straighter than a clumsy Sikh's."

Valencia listened, awe-stricken; and all the more so because this was spoken in a calm, half-abstracted voice, without a note of feeling, save where he alluded to his own mistakes. When it was over, she rose without a word, and took both his hands in her own, sobbing bitterly.

"You forgive me, then, all the misery which I have caused?"

"Do not talk so! Only forgive me having fancied for one moment that you were anything but what you are, an angel out of heaven."

Campbell hung down his head.

"Angel, truly! Azraël, the angel of death, then. Go to her now—go, and leave a humbled penitent man alone with God."

"Oh, my Saint Père!" cried she, bursting into tears. "This is too wretched—all a horrid dream—and when, too—when I had been counting on telling you something so different!—I cannot now, I have not the heart."

"What, more misery?"

"Oh no! no! no! You will know all to-morrow. Ask Scoutbush."

"I shall be gone in search of that man long before Scoutbush is awake."

"Impossible! you do not know whither he is gone."

"If I employ every detective in Bow Street, I will find him."

"Wait, only wait, till the post comes in to-morrow. He will surely write, if not to her,—wretch that he is!—at least to some of us."

"If he be alive. No. I must go up to Pen-y-gwryd, where he was last seen, and find out what I can."

"They will be all in bed at this hour of the night; and if—if anything has happened, it will be over by now," added she with a shudder.

"God forgive me! It will indeed: but he may write—perhaps to me. He is no coward, I believe; and he may send me a challenge. Yes, I will wait for the post."

"Shall you accept it if he does?"

Major Campbell smiled sadly.

"No, Miss St. Just; you may set your mind at rest upon that point. I have done quite enough harm already to your family. Now, good-bye! I will wait for the post to-morrow: do you go to your sister."

Valencia went, utterly bewildered. She had forgotten Frank, but Frank had not forgotten her. He had hurried to his room; lay till morning, sleepless with delight, and pouring out his pure spirit in thanks for this great and unexpected blessing. A new life had begun for him, even in the jaws of death. He would still go to the East. It seemed easy to him to go there in search of a grave; how much more now, when he felt so full of magic life, that fever, cholera, the chances of war, could not harm him! After this proof of God's love, how could he doubt, how fear?

Little he thought that, three doors off from him, Valencia was sitting up the whole night through, vainly trying to quiet Lucia, who refused to undress, and paced up and down her room, hour after hour in wild misery, which I have no skill to detail.

CHAPTER XXI.

NATURE'S MELODRAMA.

What, then, had become of Elsley? And whence had he written the fatal letter? He had hurried up the high road for half an hour and more, till the valley on the left sloped upward more rapidly, in dark dreary bogs, the moonlight shining on their runnels; while the mountain on his right sloped downwards more rapidly in dark dreary down, strewn with rocks which stood out black against the sky. He was nearing the head of the watershed; soon he saw slate roofs glittering in the moonlight, and found himself at the little inn of Pen-y-gwryd, at the meeting of the three great valleys, the central heart of the mountains.

And a genial, jovial little heart it is, and an honest, kindly little heart too, with warm life-blood within. So it looked that night, with every window red with comfortable light, and a long stream of glare pouring across the road from the open door, gilding the fir-tree tops in front: but its geniality only made

him shudder. He had been there more than once, and knew the place and the people; and knew, too, that of all people in the world, they were the least like him. He hurried past the doorway, and caught one glimpse of the bright kitchen. A sudden thought struck him. He would go in and write his letter there. But not yet—he could not go in yet; for through the open door came some sweet Welsh air, so sweet, that even he paused to listen. Men were singing in three parts, in that rich metallic temper of voice, and that perfect time and tune, which is the one gift still left to that strange Cymry race, worn out with the long burden of so many thousand years. He knew the air; it was "The Rising of the Lark." Heavens! what a bitter contrast to his own thoughts! But he stood rooted, as if spell-bound, to hear it to the end. The lark's upward flight was over; and Elsley heard him come quivering down from heaven's gate, fluttering, sinking, trilling self-complacently, springing aloft in one bar, only to sink lower in the next, and call more softly to his brooding mate below; till, worn out with his ecstacy, he murmured one last sigh of joy, and sank into the nest. The picture flashed through Elsley's brain as swiftly as the notes did through his ears. He breathed more freely when it vanished with the sounds. He strode hastily in, and down the little passage to the kitchen.

It was a low room, ceiled with dark beams, from which hung bacon and fishing-rods, harness and drying stockings, and all the miscellanea of a fishing inn kept by a farmer, and beneath it the usual happy, hearty, honest group. There was Harry Owen, bland and stalwart, his baby in his arms, smiling upon the world in general; old Mrs. Pritchard, bending over the fire, putting the last touch to one of those miraculous soufflets, compact of clouds and nectar, which transport alike palate and fancy, at the first mouthful, from Snowdon to Belgrave Square. A sturdy fair-haired Saxon Gourbannelig sat with his back to the door, and two of the beautiful children on his knee, their long locks flowing over the elbows of his shooting jacket, as, with both arms round them, he made Punch for them with his handkerchief and his fingers, and chattered to them in English, while they chattered in Welsh. By him sat another Englishman, to whom the three tuneful Snowdon guides, their music-score upon their knees, sat listening approvingly, as he rolled out, with voice as of a jolly blackbird, or jollier monk of old, the good old Wessex song:—

> "My dog he has his master's nose,
> To smell a knave through silken hose;
> If friends or honest men go by,
> Welcome, quoth my dog and I!

"Of foreign tongues let scholars brag,
With fifteen names for a pudding-bag:
Two tongues I know ne'er told a lie;
And their wearers be, my dog and I!"

"That ought to be Harry's song, and the colly's too, eh?" said he, pointing to the dear old dog, who sat with his head on Owen's knee—"eh, my men? Here's a health to the honest man and his dog!"

And all laughed and drank; while Elsley's dark face looked in at the door-way, and half turned to escape. Handsome lady-like Mrs. Owen, bustling out of the kitchen with a supper-tray, ran full against him, and uttered a Welsh scream.

"Show me a room, and bring me a pen and paper," said he; and then started in his turn, as all had started at him; for the two Englishmen looked round, and, behold, to his disgust, the singer was none other than Naylor; the actor of Punch was Wynd.

To have found his *bêtes noires* even here, and at such a moment! And what was worse, to hear Mrs. Owen say,—"We have no room, Sir, unless these gentlemen—"

"Of course," said Wynd, jumping up, a child under each arm. "Mr. Vavasour! we shall be most happy to have your company,—for a week if you will!"

"Ten minutes' solitude is all I ask, Sir, if I am not intruding too far."

"Two hours, if you like. We'll stay here. Mrs. Owen,—the thicker the merrier." But Elsley had vanished into a chamber bestrewn with plaids, pipes, hob-nail boots, fishing-tackle, mathematical books, scraps of ore, and the wild confusion of a gownsman's den.

"The party is taken ill with a poem," said Wynd.

Naylor stuck out his heavy under-lip, and glanced sidelong at his friend.

"With something worse, Ned. That man's eye and voice had something uncanny in them. Mellot said he would go crazed some day; and be hanged if I don't think he is so now."

Another five minutes, and Elsley rang the bell violently for hot brandy-and-water.

Mrs. Owen came back looking a little startled, a letter in her hand.

"The gentleman had drunk the liquor off at one draught, and ran out of the house like a wild man. Harry Owen must go down to Beddgelert instantly with the letter; and there was five shillings to pay for all."

Harry Owen rises, like a strong and patient beast of burden, ready for any amount of walking, at any hour in the twenty-four.

He has been up Snowdon once to-day already. He is going up again at twelve to-night, with a German who wants to see the sun rise; he deputes that office to John Roberts, and strides out.

"Which way did the gentleman go, Mrs. Owen?" asks Naylor.

"Capel Curig road."

Naylor whispers to Wynd, who sets the two little girls on the table, and hurries out with him. They look up the road, and see no one; run a couple of hundred yards, where they catch a sight of the next turn, clear in the moonlight. There is no one on the road.

"Run to the bridge, Wynd," whispers Naylor. "He may have thrown himself over."

"Tally ho!" whispers Wynd in return, laying his hand on Naylor's arm, and pointing to the left of the road.

A hundred yards from them, over the boggy upland, among scattered boulders, a dark figure is moving. Now he stops short, gesticulating; turns right and left irresolutely. At last he hurries on and upward; he is running, springing from stone to stone.

"There is but one thing, Wynd. After him, or he'll drown himself in Llyn Cwm Fynnon."

"No, he's striking to the right. Can he be going up the Glyder?"

"We'll see that in five minutes. All in the day's work, my boy! I could go up Mont Blanc with such a dinner in me."

The two gallant men run in, struggle into their wet boots again, and provisioned with meat and bread, whiskey, tobacco, and plaids, are away upon Elsley's tracks, having left Mrs. Owen disconsolate by their announcement, that a sudden fancy to sleep on the Glyder has seized them. Nothing more will they tell her, or any one; being gentlemen, however much slang they may talk in private.

Elsley left the door of Pen-y-gwryd, careless whither he went, if he went only far enough.

In front of him rose the Glyder Vawr, its head shrouded in soft mist, through which the moonlight gleamed upon the chequered quarries of that enormous desolation, the dead bones of the eldest-born of time. A wild longing seized him; he would escape up thither; up into those clouds, up anywhere to be alone—alone with his miserable self. That was dreadful enough: but less dreadful than having a companion,—ay, even a stone by him—which could remind him of the scene which he had left; even remind him that there was another human being on earth beside himself. Yes,—to put that cliff between him

and all the world! Away he plunged from the high road, splashing over boggy uplands, scrambling among scattered boulders, across a stony torrent bed, and then across another and another:—when would he reach that dark marbled wall, which rose into the infinite blank,—looking within a stone-throw of him, and yet no nearer after he had walked a mile?

He reached it at last, and rushed up the talus of boulders, springing from stone to stone; till his breath failed him, and he was forced to settle into a less frantic pace. But upward he would go, and upward he went, with a strength which he never had felt before. Strong? How should he not be strong, while every vein felt filled with molten lead; while some unseen power seemed not so much to attract him upwards, as to drive him by magical repulsion from all that he had left below?

So upward and upward ever, driven on by the terrible gad-fly, like Io of old he went; stumbling upwards along torrent beds of slippery slate, writhing himself upward through crannies where the waterfall plashed cold upon his chest and face, yet could not cool the inward fire; climbing, hand and knee, up cliffs of sharp-edged rock; striding over downs where huge rocks lay crouched in the grass, like fossil monsters of some ancient world, and seemed to stare at him with still and angry brows. Upward still, to black terraces of lava, standing out hard and black against the grey cloud, gleaming like iron in the moonlight, stair above stair, like those over which Vathek and the Princess climbed up to the halls of Eblis. Over their crumbling steps, up through their cracks and crannies, out upon a dreary slope of broken stones, and then,—before he dives upward into the cloud ten yards above his head,—one breathless look back upon the world.

The horizontal curtain of mist; gauzy below, fringed with white tufts and streamers, deepening above into the blackness of utter night. Below it a long gulf of soft yellow haze in which, as in a bath of gold, lie delicate bars of far-off western cloud; and the faint glimmer of the western sea, above long knotted spurs of hill, in deepest shades, like a bunch of purple grapes flecked here and there from behind with gleams of golden light; and beneath them again, the dark woods sleeping over Gwynnant, and their dark double sleeping in the bright lake below.

On the right hand Snowdon rises. Vast sheets of utter blackness—vast sheets of shining light. He can see every crag which juts from the green walls of Galt-y-Wennalt; and far past it into the Great Valley of Cwm Dyli; and then the red peak, now as black as night, shuts out the world with its huge mist-topped cone. But on the left hand all is deepest shade. From the

highest saw-edges where Moel Meirch cuts the golden sky, down to the very depths of the abyss, all is lustrous darkness, sooty, and yet golden still. Let the darkness lie upon it for ever! Hidden be those woods where she stood an hour ago! Hidden that road down which, even now, they may be pacing home together!—Curse the thought! He covers his face in his hands and shudders in every limb.

He lifts his hands from his eyes at last:—what has befallen?

Before the golden haze a white veil is falling fast. Sea, mountain, lake, are vanishing, fading as in a dream. Soon he can see nothing, but the twinkle of a light in Pen-y-gwryd, a thousand feet below; happy children are nestling there in innocent sleep. Jovial voices are chatting round the fire. What has he to do with youth, and health, and joy? Lower, lower, ye clouds!—Shut out that insolent and intruding spark, till nothing be seen but the silver sheet of Cwm Fynnon, and the silver zig-zag lines which wander into it among black morass, while down the mountain side go, softling sliding, troops of white mist-angels. Softly they slide, swift and yet motionless, as if by some inner will, which needs no force of limbs; gliding gently round the crags, diving gently off into the abyss, their long white robes trailing about their feet in upward-floating folds. "Let us go hence," they seem to whisper to the God-forsaken, as legends say they whispered, when they left their doomed shrine in old Jerusalem. Let the white fringe fall between him and the last of that fair troop; let the grey curtain follow, the black pall above descend; till he is alone in darkness that may be felt, and in the shadow of death.

Now he is safe at last; hidden from all living things—hidden, it may be, from God; for at least God is hidden from him. He has desired to be alone: and he is alone; the centre of the universe, if universe there be. All created things, suns and planets, seem to revolve round him, and he a point of darkness, not of light. He seems to float self-poised in the centre of the boundless nothing, upon an ell-broad slab of stone—and yet not even on that: for the very ground on which he stands he does not feel. He does not feel the mist which wets his cheek, the blood which throbs within his veins. He only is; and there is none beside.

Horrible thought! Permitted but to few, and to them—thank God!—but rarely. For two minutes of that absolute self-isolation would bring madness; if, indeed, it be not the very essence of madness itself.

There he stood; he knew not how long; without motion, without thought, without even rage or hate, now—in one blank paralysis of his whole nature; conscious only of self, and of a

dull, inward fire, as if his soul were a dark vault, lighted with lurid smoke.

* * * * * *

What was that? He started: shuddered—as well he might. Had he seen heaven opened? or another place? So momentary was the vision, that he scarce knew what he saw—

There it was again! Lasting but for a moment: but long enough to let him see the whole western heaven transfigured into one sheet of pale blue gauze, and before it Snowdon towering black as ink, with every saw and crest cut out, hard and terrible, against the lightning-glare:—and then the blank of darkness.

Again! The awful black giant, towering high in air, before the gates of that blue abyss of flame: but a black crown of cloud has settled upon his head; and out of it the lightning sparks leap to and fro, ringing his brows with a coronet of fire.

Another moment, and the roar of that great battle between earth and heaven crashed full on Elsley's ears.

He heard it leap from Snowdon, sharp and rattling, across the gulf toward him, till it crashed full upon the Glyder overhead, and rolled and flapped from crag to crag, and died away along the dreary downs. No! There it boomed out again, thundering full against Siabod on the left; and Siabod tossed it on to Moel Meirch, who answered from all her clefts and peaks with a long confused battle-growl, and then tossed it across to Aran; and Aran, with one dull, bluff report from her flat cliff, to nearer Lliwedd; till, worn out with the long buffetings of that giant ring, it sank and died on Gwynnant far below—but ere it died, another and another thunder-crash burst, sharper and nearer every time, to hurry round the hills after the one which roared before it.

Another minute, and the blue glare filled the sky once more: but no black Titan towered before it now. The storm had leapt Llanberris pass, and all around Elsley was one howling chaos of cloud, and rain, and blinding flame. He turned and fled again.

By the sensation of his feet, he knew that he was going up hill; and if he but went upward, he cared not whither he went. The rain gushed through, where the lightning pierced the cloud, in drops like musket balls. He was drenched to the skin in a moment; dazzled and giddy from the flashes; stunned by the everlasting roar, peal over-rushing peal, echo out-shooting echo, till rocks and air quivered alike beneath the continuous battle-cannonade.——"What matter? What fitter guide for such a path as mine than the blue lightning flashes?"

Poor wretch! He had gone out of his way for many a year, to give himself up, a willing captive, to the melo-dramatic view

of Nature, and had let sights and sounds, not principles and duties, mould his feelings for him: and now, in his utter need and utter weakness, he had met her in a mood which was too awful for such as he was to resist. The Nemesis had come; and swept away helplessly, without faith and hope, by those outward impressions of things on which he had feasted his soul so long, he was the puppet of his own eyes and ears; the slave of glare and noise.

Breathless, but still untired, he toiled up a steep incline, where he could feel beneath him neither moss nor herb. Now and then his feet brushed through a soft tuft of parsley fern: but soon even that sign of vegetation ceased; his feet only rasped over rough bare rock, and he was alone in a desert of stone.

What was that sudden apparition above him, seen for a moment dim and gigantic through the mist, hid the next in darkness? The next flash showed him a line of obelisks, like giants crouching side by side, staring down on him from the clouds. Another five minutes, he was at their feet, and past them; to see above them again another line of awful watchers through the storms and rains of many a thousand years, waiting, grim and silent, like those doomed senators in the Capitol of Rome, till their own turn should come, and the last lightning stroke hurl them too down, to lie for ever by their fallen brothers, whose mighty bones bestrewed the screes below.

He groped his way between them; saw some fifty yards beyond a higher peak; gained it by fierce struggles and many falls; saw another beyond that; and, rushing down and up two slopes of moss, reached a region where the upright lava-ledges had been split asunder into chasms, crushed together again into caves, toppled over each other, hurled up into spires, in such chaotic confusion, that progress seemed impossible.

A flash of lightning revealed a lofty cairn above his head. There was yet, then, a higher point! He would reach it, if he broke every limb in the attempt! and madly he hurried on, feeling his way from ledge to ledge, squeezing himself through crannies, crawling on hands and knees along the sharp chines of the rocks, till he reached the foot of the cairn; climbed it, and threw himself at full length on the summit of the Glyder Vawr.

An awful place it always is; and Elsley saw it at an awful time, as the glare unveiled below him a sea of rock-waves, all sharp on edge, pointing toward him on every side: or rather one wave-crest of a sea; for twenty yards beyond, all sloped away into the abysmal dark.

Terrible were those rocks below; and ten times more terrible as seen through the lurid glow of his distempered brain. All the weird peaks and slabs seemed pointing up at him: sharp-

toothed jaws gaped upward—tongues hissed upward—arms pointed upward—hounds leaped upward—monstrous snake-heads peered upward out of cracks and caves. Did he not see them move, writhe? or was it the ever-shifting light of the flashes? Did he not hear them howl, yell at him? or was it but the wind, tortured in their labyrinthine caverns?

The next moment, and all was dark again: but the images which had been called up remained, and fastened on his brain, and grew there; and when, in the light of the next flash, the scene returned, he could see the red lips of the phantom hounds, the bright eyes of the phantom snakes; the tongues wagged in mockery; the hands brandished great stones to hurl at him; the mountain-top was instinct with fiendish life,—a very Blocksberg of all hideous shapes and sins.

And yet he did not shrink. Horrible it was; he was going mad before it. And yet he took a strange and fierce delight in making it more horrible; in maddening himself yet more and more; in clothing those fantastic stones with every fancy which could inspire another man with dread. But he had no dread. Perfect rage, like perfect love, casts out fear. He rejoiced in his own misery, in his own danger. His life hung on a thread; any instant might hurl him from that cairn, a blackened corpse.

What better end? Let it come! He was Prometheus on the peak of Caucasus, hurling defiance at the unjust Jove! His hopes, his love, his very honour—curse it!—ruined! Let the lightning stroke come! He were a coward to shrink from it. Let him face the worst, unprotected, bare-headed, naked, and do battle, himself, and nothing but himself, against the universe! And, as men at such moments will do, in the mad desire to free the self-tortured spirit from some unseen and choking bond, he began wildly tearing off his clothes.

But merciful nature brought relief, and stopped him in his mad efforts, or he had been a frozen corpse long ere the dawn. His hands, stiff with cold, refused to obey him: as he delayed he was saved. After the paroxysm came the collapse; he sank upon the top of the cairn half senseless. He felt himself falling over its edge; and the animal instinct of self-preservation, unconsciously to him, made him slide down gently, till he sank into a crack between two rocks, sheltered somewhat, as it befell happily, from the lashing of the rain.

Another minute, and he slept a dreamless sleep.

But there are two men upon that mountain, whom neither rock nor rain, storm nor thunder have conquered, because they are simply brave honest men; and who are, perhaps, far more "poetic" characters at this moment than Elsley Vavasour, or any dozen of mere verse-writers, because they are hazarding their

lives, on an errand of mercy; and all the while have so little notion that they are hazarding their lives, or doing anything dangerous or heroic, that, instead of being touched for a moment by Nature's melodrama, they are jesting at each other's troubles, greeting each interval of darkness with mock shouts of misery and despair, likening the crags to various fogies of their acquaintance, male and female, and only pulling the cutty pipes out of their mouths to chant snatches of jovial songs. They are Wynd and Naylor, the two Cambridge boating-men, in bedrabbled flannel trousers, and shooting-jackets pocketful of water; who are both fully agreed, that hunting a mad poet over the mountains in a thunder-storm is, on the whole, "the jolliest lark they ever had in their lives."

"He must have gone up here somewhere. I saw the poor beggar against the sky as plain as I see you,—which I don't"—for darkness cut the speech short.

"Where be you, William? says the keeper."

"Here I be, Sir, says the beater, with my 'eels above my 'ed."

"Wery well, William; when you get your 'ed above your 'eels, gae on."

"But I'm stuck fast between two stones! Hang the stones!" And Naylor bursts into an old seventeeth century ditty, of the days of "three-man glees."

> "They stoans, they stoans, they stoans, they stoans——
> They stoans that built George Riddler's oven,
> O they was fetched from Blakeney quarr';
> And George he was a jolly old man,
> And his head did grow above his har'.
>
> "One thing in George Riddler I must commend,
> And I hold it for a valiant thing;
> With any three brothers in Gloucestershire
> He swore that his three sons should sing.
>
> "There was Dick the tribble, and Tom the mane,
> Let every man sing in his own place;
> And William he was the eldest brother,
> And therefore he should sing the base.——

I'm down again! This is my thirteenth fall."

"So am I! I shall just lie and light a pipe."

"Come on, now, and look round the lee side of this crag. We shall find him bundled up under the lee of one of them."

"He don't know lee from windward, I dare say."

"He'll soon find out the difference by his skin;—if it's half as wet, at least, as mine is."

"I'll tell you what, Naylor, if the poor fellow has crossed the ridge, and tried to go down on the Twll du, he's a dead man by this time."

"He'll have funked it, when he comes to the edge, and sees

nothing but mist below. But if he has wandered on to the cliffs above Trifaen, he's a dead man, then, at all events. Get out of the way of that flash! A close shave, that! I believe my whiskers are singed."

"'Pon my honour, Wynd, we ought to be saying our prayers rather than joking in this way."

"We may do both, and be none the worse. As for coming to grief, old boy, we're on a good errand, I suppose, and the devil himself can't harm us. Still, shame to him who's ashamed of saying his prayers, as Arnold used to say."

And all the while, these two brave lads have been thrusting their lanthorn into every crack and cranny, and beating round every crag carefully and cunningly, till long past two in the morning.

"Here's the ordinance cairn, at last; and—here am I astride of a carving-knife, I think! Come and help me off, or I shall be split to the chin!"

"I'm coming! What's this soft under my feet? Who-o-o-oop! Run him to earth at last!"

And diving down into a crack, Wynd drags out by the collar the unconscious Elsley.

"What a swab! Like a piece of wet blotting-paper. Lucky he's not made of salt."

"He's dead!" says Naylor.

"Not a bit. I can feel his heart. There's life in the old dog yet."

And they begin, under the lee of a rock, chafing him, wrapping him in their plaids, and pouring whiskey down his throat.

It was some time before Vavasour recovered his consciousness. The first use which he made of it was to bid his preservers leave him; querulously at first; and then fiercely, when he found out who they were.

"Leave me, I say! Cannot I be alone if I choose? What right have you to dog me in this way?"

"My dear Sir, we have as much right here as any one else; and if we find a man dying here of cold and fatigue—"

"What business of yours, if I choose to die?"

"There is no harm in your dying, Sir," says Naylor. "The harm is in our letting you die; I assure you it is entirely to satisfy our own consciences we are troubling you thus;" and he begins pressing him to take food.

"No, Sir; nothing from you! You have shown me impertinence enough in the last few weeks, without pressing on me benefits for which I do not wish. Let me go! If you will not leave me, I shall leave you!"

And he tried to rise: but, stiffened with cold, sank back again upon the rock.

In vain they tried to reason with him; begged his pardon for all past jests: he made effort after effort to get up; and at last, his limbs, regaining strength by the fierceness of his passion, supported him; and he struggled onward toward the northern slope of the mountain.

"You must not go down till it is light; it is as much as your life is worth."

"I am going to Bangor, Sir; and go I will!"

"I tell you, there is fifteen hundred feet of slippery screes below you."

"As steep as a house-roof, and with every tile on it loose. You will roll from top to bottom before you have gone a hundred yards."

"What care I? Let me go, I say! Curse you, Sir! Do you mean to use force?"

"I do," said Wynd quietly, as he took him round arms and body, and set him down on the rock like a child.

"You have assaulted me, Sir! The law shall avenge this insult, if there be law in England!"

"I know nothing about law: but I suppose it will justify me in saving any man's life who is rushing to certain death."

"Look here, Sir!" said Naylor. "Go down, if you will, when it grows light: but from this place you do not stir yet. Whatever you may think of our conduct to-night, you will thank us for it to-morrow morning, when you see where you are."

The unhappy man stamped with rage. The red glare of the lanthorn showed him his two powerful warders, standing right and left. He felt that there was no escape from them, but in darkness; and suddenly he dashed at the lanthorn, and tried to tear it out of Wynd's hands.

"Steady, Sir!" said Wynd, springing back, and parrying his outstretched hand. "If you wish us to consider you in your senses, you will be quiet."

"And if you don't choose to appear sane," said Naylor, "you must not be surprised if we treat you as men are treated who—you understand me."

Elsley was silent awhile; his rage, finding itself impotent, subsided into dark cunning. "Really, gentlemen," he said at length, "I believe you are right; I have been very foolish, and you very kind; but you would excuse my absurdities if you knew their provocation."

"My dear Sir," said Naylor, "we are bound to believe that you have good cause enough for what you are doing. We have no wish to interfere impertinently. Only wait till daylight, and wrap yourself in one of our plaids, as the only possible

method of carrying out your own intentions; for dead men can't go to Bangor, whithersoever else they may go."

"You really are too kind; but I believe I must accept your offer, under penalty of being called mad;" and Elsley laughed a hollow laugh; for he was by no means sure that he was not mad. He took the proffered wrapper; lay down; and seemed to sleep.

Wynd and Naylor, congratulating themselves on his better mind, lay down also beneath the other plaid, intending to watch him. But worn out with fatigue, they were both fast asleep, ere ten minutes had passed.

Elsley had determined to keep himself awake at all risks; and he paid a bitter penalty for so doing; for now that the fury had passed away, his brain began to work freely again, and inflicted torture so exquisite, that he looked back with regret on the unreasoning madness of last night, as a less fearful hell than that of thought; of deliberate, acute recollections, suspicions, trains of argument, which he tried to thrust from him, and yet could not. Who has not known in the still, sleepless hours of night, how dark thoughts will possess the mind with terrors, which seem logical, irrefragable, inevitable?

So it was then with the wretched Elsley; within his mind a whole train of devil's advocates seemed arguing, with triumphant subtlety, the certainty of Lucia's treason; and justifying to him his rage, his hatred, his flight, his desertion of his own children, —if indeed (so far had the devil led him astray) they were his own. At last he could bear it no longer. He would escape to Bangor, and then to London, cross to France, to Italy, and there bury himself amid the forests of the Apennines, or the sunny glens of Calabria. And for a moment the vision of a poet's life in that glorious land brightened his dark imagination. Yes! He would escape thither, and be at peace; and if the world heard of him again, it should be in such a thunder-voice, as those with which Shelley and Byron, from their southern seclusion, had shaken the ungrateful motherland which cast them out. He would escape; and now was the time to do it! For the rain had long since ceased; the dawn was approaching fast; the cloud was thinning from black to pearly grey. Now was his time— were it not for those two men! To be kept, guarded, stopped by them, or by any man! Shameful! intolerable! He had fled hither to be free, and even here he found himself a prisoner. True, they had promised to let him go if he waited till daylight; but perhaps they were deceiving him, as he was deceiving them, —why not? They thought him mad. It was a ruse, a stratagem to keep him quiet awhile, and then bring him back,—"restore him to his afflicted friends." His friends, truly! He would be

too cunning for them yet. And even if they meant to let him go, would he accept liberty from them, or any man? No; he was free! He had a right to go; and go he would, that moment!

He raised himself cautiously. The lanthorn had burned to the socket: and he could not see the men, though they were not four yards off; but by their regular and heavy breathing he could tell that they both slept soundly. He slipped from under the plaid; drew off his shoes, for fear of noise among the rocks, and rose. What if he did make a noise? What if they woke, chased him, brought him back by force? Curse the thought! And gliding close to them, he listened again to their heavy breathing.

How could he prevent their following him?

A horrible, nameless temptation came over him. Every vein in his body throbbed fire; his brain seemed to swell to bursting; and ere he was aware, he found himself feeling about in the darkness for a loose stone.

He could not find one. Thank God that he could not find one! But after that dreadful thought had once crossed his mind, he must flee from that place ere the brand of Cain be on his brow.

With a cunning and activity utterly new to him, he glided away, like a snake; downward over crags and boulders, he knew not how long or how far; all he knew was, that he was going down, down, down, into a dim abyss. There was just light enough to discern the upper surface of a rock within arm's length; beyond that all was blank. He seemed to be hours descending; to be going down miles after miles: and still he reached no level spot. The mountain-side was too steep for him to stand upright, except at moments. It seemed one uniform quarry of smooth broken slate, slipping down for ever beneath his feet.—— Whither? He grew giddy, and more giddy; and a horrible fantastic notion seized him, that he had lost his way; that somehow, the precipice had no bottom, no end at all; that he was going down some infinite abyss, into the very depths of the earth, and the molten roots of the mountains, never to reascend. He stopped, trembling, only to slide down again; terrified, he tried to struggle upward: but the shale gave way beneath his feet, and go he must.

What was that noise above his head? A falling stone? Were his enemies in pursuit? Down to the depth of hell rather than that they should take him! He drove his heels into the slippery shale, and rushed forward blindly, springing, slipping, falling, rolling, till he stopped breathless on a jutting slab.

And lo! below him, through the thin pearly veil of cloud, a dim world of dark cliffs, blue lakes, grey mountains with their dark heads wrapped in cloud, and the straight vale of Nant Francon, magnified in mist, till it seemed to stretch for hundreds

of leagues towards the rosy north-east dawning and the shining sea.

With a wild shout he hurried onward. In five minutes he was clear of the cloud. He reached the foot of that enormous slope, and hurried over rocky ways, till he stopped at the top of a precipice, full six hundred feet above the lonely tarn of Idwal.

Never mind. He knew where he was now; he knew that there was a passage somewhere, for he had once seen one from below. He found it, and almost ran along the boggy shore of Idwal, looking back every now and then at the black wall of the Twll du, in dread lest he should see two moving specks in hot pursuit.

And now he had gained the shore of Ogwen, and the broad coach-road; and down it he strode, running at times, past the roaring cataract, past the enormous cliffs of the Carnedds, past Tin-y-maes, where nothing was stirring but a barking dog; on through the sleeping streets of Bethesda, past the black stairs of the Penrhyn quarry. The huge clicking ant-heap was silent now, save for the roar of Ogwen, as he swirled and bubbled down, rich coffee-brown from last night's rain.

On, past rich woods, past trim cottages, gardens gay with flowers; past rhododendron shrubberies, broad fields of golden stubble, sweet clover, and grey swedes, with Ogwen making music far below. The sun is up at last, and Colonel Pennant's grim slate castle, towering above black woods, glitters metallic in its rays, like Chaucer's house of fame. He stops, to look back once. Far up the vale, eight miles away, beneath a roof of cloud, the pass of Nant Francon gapes high in air between the great jaws of the Carnedd and the Glyder, its cliffs marked with the upright white line of the waterfall. He is clear of the mountains; clear of that cursed place, and all its cursed thoughts! On, past Llandegai and all its rose-clad cottages; past yellow quarrymen walking out to their work, who stare as they pass at his haggard face, drenched clothes, and streaming hair. He does not see them. One fixed thought is in his mind, and that is, the railway station at Bangor.

He is striding through Bangor streets now, beside the summer sea, from which fresh scents of shore-weed greet him. He had rather smell the smoke and gas of the Strand.

The station is shut. He looks at the bill outside. There is no train for full two hours; and he throws himself, worn out with fatigue, upon the door-step.

Now a new terror seizes him. Has he money enough to reach London? Has he his purse at all? Too dreadful to find himself stopped short, on the very brink of deliverance! A cold perspiration breaks from his forehead, as he feels in every pocket.

Yes, his purse is there: but he turns sick as he opens it, and dare hardly look. Hurrah! Five pounds, six—eight! That will take him as far as Paris. He can walk; beg the rest of the way, if need be.

What will he do now? Wander over the town, and gaze vacantly at one little object and another about the house fronts. One thing he will not look at; and that is the bright summer sea, all golden in the sun rays, flecked with gay white sails. From all which is bright and calm, and cheerful, his soul shrinks as from an impertinence; he longs for the lurid gas-light of London, and the roar of the Strand, and the everlasting stream of faces, among whom he may wander free, sure that no one will recognise him, the disgraced, the desperate.

The weary hours roll on. Too tired to stand longer, he sits down on the shafts of a cart, and tries not to think. It is not difficult. Body and mind are alike worn out, and his brain seems filled with uniform dull mist.

A shop-door opens in front of him; a boy comes out. He sees bottles inside, and shelves, the look of which he knows too well.

The bottle-boy, whistling, begins to take the shutters down. How often, in Whitbury of old, had Elsley done the same! Half amused, he watched the lad, and wandered how he spent his evenings, and what works he read, and whether he ever thought of writing poetry.

And as he watched, all his past life rose up before him, ever since he served out medicines fifteen years ago;—his wild aspirations, heavy labours, struggles, plans, brief triumphs, long disappointments: and here was what it had all come to,—a failure,—a miserable, shameful failure! Not that he thought of it with repentance, with a single wish that he had done otherwise: but only with disappointed rage. "Yes!" he said bitterly to himself—

> "'We poets in our youth begin in gladness,
> But after come despondency and madness.

"This is the way of the world with all who have nobler feelings in them than will fit into its cold rules. Curse the world! what on earth had I to do with mixing myself up in it, and marrying a fine lady? Fool that I was! I might have known from the first that she could not understand me; that she would go back to her own! Let her go! I will forget her, and the world, and everything—and I know how!"

And, springing up, he walked across to the druggist's shop.

Years before, Elsley had tried opium, and found, unhappily for him, that it fed his fancy without inflicting those tortures of

indigestion which keep many, happily for them, from its magic snare. He had tried it more than once of late: but Lucia had had a hint of the fact from Thurnall; and in just terror had exacted from him a solemn promise never to touch opium again. Elsley was a man of honour, and the promise had been kept. But now—"I promised her, and therefore I will break my promise! She has broken hers, and I am free!"

And he went in and bought his opium. He took a little on the spot, to allay the cravings of hunger. He reserved a full dose for the railway-carriage. It would bridge over the weary gulf of time which lay between him and town.

He took his second-class place at last; not without stares and whispers from those round at the wild figure which was starting for London, without bag or baggage. But as the clerks agreed, "If he was running away from his creditors, it was a shame to stop him. If he was running from the police, they would have the more sport the longer the run. At least, it was no business of theirs."

There was one thing more to do, and he did it. He wrote to Campbell, a short note.

"If, as I suppose, you expect from me 'the satisfaction of a gentleman,' you will find me at * * * Adelphi. I am not escaping from you, but from the whole world. If, by shooting me, you can quicken my escape, you will do me the first and last favour which I am likely to ask for from you."

He posted his letter, settled himself in a corner of the carriage, and took his second dose of opium. From that moment he recollected little more. A confused whirl of hedges and woods, rattling stations, screaming and flashing trains, great red towns, white chalk cuttings; while the everlasting roar and rattle of the carriages shaped themselves in his brain into a hundred snatches of old tunes, all full of a strange merriment, as if mocking at his misery, striving to keep him awake and conscious of who and what he was. He closed his eyes and shut out the hateful, garish world: but that sound he could not shut out. Too tired to sleep, too tired even to think, he could do nothing but submit to the ridiculous torment; watching in spite of himself every note, as one jig-tune after another was fiddled by all the imps close to his ear, mile after mile, and county after county, for all that weary day, which seemed full seven years long.

At Euston Square the porter called him several times ere he could rouse him. He could hear nothing for awhile but that same imps' melody, even though it had stopped. At last he got out, staring round him, shook himself awake by one strong effort, and hurried away, not knowing whither he went.

Wrapt up in self, he wandered on till dark, slept on a door-

step, and awoke, not knowing at first where he was. Gradually all the horror came back to him, and with the horror the craving for opium wherewith to forget it.

He looked round to see his whereabouts. Surely this must be Golden Square? A sudden thought struck him. He went to a chemist's shop, bought a fresh supply of his poison, and, taking only enough to allay the cravings of his stomach, hurried tottering in the direction of Drury Lane.

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CHAPTER XXII.

FOND, YET NOT FOOLISH.

NEXT morning, only Claude and Campbell made their appearance at breakfast.

Frank came in; found that Valencia was not down: and, too excited to eat, went out to walk till she should appear. Neither did Lord Scoutbush come. Where was he?

Ignorant of the whole matter, he had started at four o'clock to fish in the Traeth Mawr; half for fishing's sake, half (as he confessed) to gain time for his puzzled brains before those explanations with Frank Headley, of which he stood in mortal fear.

Mellot and Campbell sat down together to breakfast; but in silence. Claude saw that something had gone very wrong; Campbell ate nothing, and looked nervously out of the window every now and then.

At last Bowie entered with the letters and a message. There were two gentlemen from Pen-y-gwryd must speak with Mr. Mellot immediately.

He went out and found Wynd and Naylor. What they told him we know already. He returned instantly, and met Campbell leaving the room.

"I have news of Vavasour," whispered he. "I have a letter from him. Bowie, order me a car instantly for Bangor. I am off to London, Claude. You and Bowie will take care of my things, and send them after me."

"Major Cawmill has only to command," said Bowie, and vanished down the stairs.

"Now, Claude, quick; read that, and counsel me. I ought to ask Scoutbush's opinion; but the poor dear fellow is out, you see."

Claude read the note written at Bangor.

"Fight him I will not! I detest the notion: a soldier should

never fight a duel. His life is the Queen's, and not his own. And yet, if the honour of the family has been compromised by my folly, I must pay the penalty, if Scoutbush thinks it proper."

So said Campbell, who, in the over-sensitiveness of his conscience, had actually worked himself round during the past night into this new fancy, as a chivalrous act of utter self-abasement. The proud self-possession of the man was gone, and nothing but self-distrust and shame remained.

"In the name of all wit and wisdom, what is the meaning of all this?"

"You do not know, then, what passed last night?"

"I? I can only guess that Vavasour has had one of his rages."

"Then you must know," said Campbell with an effort: "for you must explain all to Scoutbush when he returns; and I know no one more fit for the office." And he briefly told him the story.

Mellot was much affected. "The wretched ape! Campbell, your first thought was the true one: you must not fight that cur. After all, it's a farce: you won't fire at him, and he can't hit you—so leave ill alone. Beside, for Scoutbush's sake, her sake, every one's sake, the thing must be hushed up. If the fellow chooses to duck under into the London mire, let him lie there, and forget him!"

"No, Claude; his pardon I must beg, ere I go out to the war: or I shall die with a sin upon my soul."

"My dear, noble creature! if you must go, I go with you. I must see fair play between you and that madman; and give him a piece of my mind, too, while I am about it. He is in my power. or if not quite that, I know one in whose power he is! and to reason he shall be brought."

"No; you must stay here. I cannot trust Scoutbush's head, and these poor dear souls will have no one to look to but you. I can trust you with them, I know. Me you will perhaps never see again."

"You can trust me!" said the affectionate little painter, the tears starting to his eyes, as he wrung Campbell's hand.

"Mind one thing! If that Vavasour shows his teeth, there is a spell will turn him to stone. Use it!"

"Heaven forbid! Let him show his teeth. It is I who am in the wrong. Why should I make him more my enemy than he is?'

"Be it so. Only, if the worst comes to the worst, call him not Elsley Vavasour, but plain John Briggs—and see what follows."

Valencia entered.

"The post has come in! Oh, dear Major Campbell, is there a letter?"

He put the note into her hand in silence. She read it, and darted back to Lucia's room.

"Thank God that she did not see that I was going! One more pang on earth spared!" said Campbell to himself.

Valencia hurried to Lucia's door. She was holding it ajar and looking out with pale face, and wild hungry eyes.—"A letter? Don't be silent, or I shall go mad! Tell me the worst! Is he alive?"

"Yes."

She gasped, and staggered against the door-post.

"Where? Why does he not come back to me?" asked she, in a confused, abstracted way.

It was best to tell the truth, and have it over.

"He has gone to London, Lucia. He will think over it all there, and be sorry for it, and then all will be well again."

But Lucia did not hear the end of that sentence. Murmuring to herself, "To London! To London!" she hurried back into the room.

"Clara! Clara! have the children had their breakfast?"

"Yes, Ma'am!" says Clara, appearing from the inner room.

"Then help me to pack up, quick! Your master is gone to London on business; and we are to follow him immediately."

And she began bustling about the room.

"My dearest Lucia, you are not fit to travel now!"

"I shall die if I stay here; die if I do nothing! I must find him!" whispered she. "Don't speak loud, or Clara will hear. I can find him, and nobody can but me! Why don't you help me to pack, Valencia?"

"My dearest! but what will Scoutbush say when he comes home, and finds you gone?"

"What right has he to interfere? I am Elsley's wife, am I not? and may follow my husband if I like:" and she went on desperately collecting, not her own things, but Elsley's.

Valencia watched her with tear-brimming eyes; collecting all his papers, counting over his clothes, murmuring to herself that he would want this and that in London. Her sanity seemed failing her, under the fixed idea that she had only to see him, and set all right with a word.

"I will go and get you some breakfast," said she at last.

"I want none. I am too busy to eat. Why don't you help me?"

Valencia had not the heart to help, believing, as she did, that Lucia's journey would be as bootless as it would be dangerous to her health.

"I will bring you some breakfast, and you must try; then I

will help to pack:" and utterly bewildered she went out; and the thought uppermost in her mind was,—"Oh, that I could find Frank Headley!"

Happy was it for Frank's love, paradoxical as it may seem, that it had conquered just at that moment of terrible distress. Valencia's acceptance of him had been hasty, founded rather on sentiment and admiration than on deep affection; and her feeling might have faltered, waned, died away in self-distrust of its own reality, if giddy amusement, if mere easy happiness, had followed it. But now the fire of affliction was branding in the thought of him upon her softened heart.

Living at the utmost strain of her character, Campbell gone, her brother useless, and Lucia and the children depending utterly on her, there was but one to whom she could look for comfort while she needed it most utterly; and happy for her and for her lover that she could go to him.

"Poor Lucia! thank God that I have some one who will never treat me so! who will lift me up and shield me, instead of crushing me!—dear creature!—Oh that I may find him!" And her heart went out after Frank with a gush of tenderness which she had never felt before.

"Is this, then, love?" she asked herself; and she found time to slip into her own room for a moment and arrange her dishevelled hair, ere she entered the breakfast-room.

Frank was there, luckily alone, pacing nervously up and down. He hurried up to her, caught both her hands in his, and gazed into her wan and haggard face with the intensest tenderness and anxiety.

Valencia's eyes looked into the depths of his, passive and confiding, till they failed before the keenness of his gaze, and swam in glittering mist.

"Ah!" thought she; "sorrow is a light price to pay for the feeling of being so loved by such a man!"

"You are tired,—ill? What a night you must have had! Mellot has told me all."

"Oh, my poor sister!" and wildly she poured out to Frank her wrath against Elsley, her inability to comfort Lucia, and all the misery and confusion of the past night.

"This is a sad dawning for the day of my triumph!" thought Frank, who longed to pour out his heart to her on a thousand very different matters: but he was content; it was enough for him that she could tell him all, and confide in him; a truer sign of affection than any selfish love-making; and he asked, and answered, with such tenderness and thoughtfulness for poor Lucia, with such a deep comprehension of Elsley's character, pitying while he blamed, that he won his reward at last.

"Oh! it would be intolerable, if I had not through it all the thought—" and blushing crimson, her head drooped on her bosom. She seemed ready to drop with exhaustion.

"Sit down, sit down, or you will fall!" said Frank, leading her to a chair; and as he led her, he whispered with fluttering heart, new to its own happiness, and longing to make assurance sure—"What thought?"

She was silent still; but he felt her hand tremble in his.

"The thought of me?"

She looked up in his face; how beautiful! And in another moment, neither knew how, she was clasped to his bosom.

He covered her face, her hair with kisses: she did not move; from that moment she felt that he was her husband.

"Oh, guide me! counsel me! pray for me!" sobbed she. "I am all alone, and my poor sister, she is going mad, I think, and I have no one to trust but you; and you—you will leave me to go to those dreadful wars; and then, what will become of me? Oh, stay! only a few days!" and holding him convulsively, she answered his kisses with her own.

Frank stood as in a dream, while the room reeled round and vanished; and he was alone for a moment upon earth with her and his great love.

"Tell me," said he, at last, trying to awaken himself to action. "Tell me! Is she really going to seek him?"

"Yes, selfish and forgetful that I am! You must help me! she will go to London, nothing can stop her;—and it will kill her!"

"It may drive her mad to keep her here."

"It will! and that drives me mad also. What can I choose?"

"Follow where God leads. It is she, after all, who must reclaim him. Leave her in God's hands, and go with her to London."

"But my brother?"

"Mellot or I will see him. Let it be me. Mellot shall go with you to London."

"Oh that you were going!"

"Oh that I were! I will follow, though. Do you think that I can be long away from you? . . . . But I must tell your brother. I had a very different matter on which to speak to him this morning," said he, with a sad smile: "but better as it is. He shall find me, I hope, reasonable and trustworthy in this matter; perhaps enough so to have my Valencia committed to me. Precious jewel! I must learn to be a man now, at least; now that I have you to care for."

"And yet you go and leave me?"

"Valencia! Because God has given us to each other, shall our thank-offering be to shrink cowardly from His work?"

He spoke more sternly than he intended, to awe into obedience rather himself than her; for he felt, poor fellow, his courage failing fast, while he held that treasure in his arms.

She shuddered in silence.

"Forgive me!" he cried; "I was too harsh, Valencia!"

"No!" she cried, looking up at him with a glorious smile. "Scold me! Be harsh to me! It is so delicious now to be reproved by you!" And as she spoke she felt as if she would rather endure torture from that man's hand than bliss from any other. How many strange words of Lucia's that new feeling explained to her; words at which she had once grown angry, as doting weaknesses, unjust and degrading to self-respect. Poor Lucia! She might be able to comfort her now, for she had learnt to sympathise with her by experience the very opposite to hers. Yet there must have been a time when Lucia clung to Elsley as she to Frank. How horrible to have her eyes opened thus!—To be torn and flung away from the bosom where she longed to rest! It could never happen to her. Of course her Frank was true, though all the world were false: but poor Lucia! She must go to her. This was mere selfishness at such a moment.

"You will find Scoutbush, then?"

"This moment. I will order the car now, if you will only eat. You must!"

And he rang the bell, and then made her sit down and eat, almost feeding her with his own hand. That, too, was a new experience; and one so strangely pleasant, that when Bowie entered, and stared solemnly at the pair, she only looked up smiling, though blushing a little.

"Get a car instantly," said she.

"For Mrs. Vavasour, my lady? She has ordered hers already."

"No; for Mr. Headley. He is going to find my lord. Frank, pour me out a cup of tea for Lucia."

Bowie vanished, mystified. "It's no concern of mine; but better tak' up wi' a godly meenister than a godless pawet," said the worthy warrior to himself as he marched down stairs.

"You see that I am asserting our rights already before all the world," said she, looking up.

"I see you are not ashamed of me."

"Ashamed of you?"

"And now I must go to Lucia."

"And to London."

Valencia began to cry like any baby; but rose and carried away the tea in her hand. "Must I go? and before you com back, too?"

"Is she determined to start instantly?"

"I cannot stop her. You see she has ordered the car."

"Then go, my darling! My own! my Valencia! Oh, a thousand things to ask you, and no time to ask them in! I can write?" said Frank, with an inquiring smile.

"Write? Yes; every day,—twice a day. I shall live upon those letters. Good-bye!" And out she went, while Frank sat himself down at the table, and laid his head upon his hands, stupified with delight, till Bowie entered.

"The car, Sir."

"Which? Who?" asked Frank, looking up as from a dream.

"The car, Sir."

Frank rose, and walked down stairs abstractedly. Bowie kept close to his side.

"Ye'll pardon me, Sir," said he in a low voice; "but I see how it is,—the more blessing for you. Ye'll be pleased, I trust to take more care of this jewel than others have of that one: or—"

"Or you'll shoot me yourself, Bowie?" said Frank, half amused, half awed, too, by the stern tone of the guardsman. "I'll give you leave to do it if I deserve it."

"It's no my duty, either as a soldier or as a valet. And, indeed, I've that opeenion of you, Sir, that I don't think it'll need to be any one's else's duty either."

And so did Mr. Bowie signify his approbation of the new family romance, and went off to assist Mrs. Clara in getting the trunks down stairs.

Clara was in high dudgeon. She had not yet completed her flirtation with Mr. Bowie, and felt it hard to have her one amusement in life snatched out of her hard-worked hands.

"I'm sure I don't know why we're moving. I don't believe it's business. Some of his tantrums, I dare say. I heard her walking up and down the room all last night, I'll swear. Neither she nor Miss Valencia have been to bed. He'll kill her at last, the brute!"

"It's no concern of either of us, that. Have ye got another trunk to bring down?"

"No concern? Just like your hard-heartedness, Mr. Bowie. And as soon as I'm gone, of course you will be flirting with these impudent Welshwomen, in their horrid hats."

"May be, yes; may be, no. But flirting's no marrying, Mrs. Clara."

"True for you, Sir! Men were deceivers ever," quoth Clara, and flounced up stairs; while Bowie looked after her with a grim smile, and caught her, when she came down again, long enough to give her a great kiss; the only language which he used in wooing, and that but rarely.

"Dinna fash, lassie. Mind your lady and the poor bairns' like a godly handmaiden, and I'll buy the ring when the sawmon fishing's over, and we'll just be married ere I start for the Crimee."

"The sawmon!" cried Clara. "I'll see you turned into a mermaid first, and married to a sawmon!"

"And ye won't do anything o' the kind," said Bowie to himself, and shouldered a valise.

In ten minutes the ladies were packed into the carriage, and away, under Mellot's care. Frank watched Valencia looking back, and smiling through her tears, as they rolled through the village; and then got into his car, and rattled down the southern road to Pont Aberglaslyn, his hand still tingling with the last pressure of Valencia's.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE BROAD STONE OF HONOUR.

But where has Stangrave been all this while?

Where any given bachelor has been, for any given month, is difficult to say, and no man's business but his own. But where he happened to be on a certain afternoon in the first week of October, on which he had just heard the news of Alma, was,—upon the hills between Ems and Coblentz. Walking over a high table-land of stubbles, which would be grass in England; and yet with all its tillage is perhaps not worth more than English grass would be, thanks to that small-farm system much be-praised by some who know not wheat from turnips. Then along a road, which might be a Devon one, cut in the hill-side, through authentic "Devonian" slate, where the deep chocolate soil is lodged on the top of the upright strata, and a thick coat of moss and wood sedge clusters about the oak-scrub roots, round which the delicate and rare oak-fern mingles its fronds with great blue campanulas; while the "white admirals" and silver-washed "fritillaries" flit round every bramble bed, and the great "purple emperors" come down to drink in the road puddles, and sit fearless, flashing off their velvet wings a blue as of that empyrean which is "dark by excess of light."

Down again through cultivated lands, corn and clover, flax and beet, and all the various crops with which the industrious German yeoman ekes out his little patch of soil. Past the thrifty husbandman himself, as he guides the two milch-kine in his tiny plough, and stops at the furrow's end, to greet you with

the hearty German smile and bow; while the little fair-haired maiden, walking beneath the shade of standard cherries, walnuts, and pears, all grey with fruit, fills the cows' mouths with chicory, and wild carnations, and pink saintfoin, and many a fragrant weed which richer England wastes.

Down once more, into a glen; but such a glen as neither England nor America has ever seen; or, please God, ever will see, glorious as it is. Stangrave, who knew all Europe well, had walked the path before; but he stopped then, as he had done the first time, in awe. On the right, slope up the bare slate downs, up to the foot of cliffs: but only half of those cliffs God has made. Above the grey slate ledges rise cliffs of man's handiwork, pierced with a hundred square black embrasures; and above them the long barrack-ranges of a soldiers' town; which a foeman stormed once, when it was young: but what foeman will ever storm it again? What conqueror's foot will ever tread again upon the "broad stone of honour," and call Ehrenbreitstein his?

On the left the clover and the corn range on, beneath the orchard boughs, up to yon knoll of chestnut and acacia, tall poplar, feathered larch:—but what is that stonework which gleams grey beneath their stems? A summer-house for some great duke, looking out over the glorious Rhine vale, and up the long vineyards of the bright Moselle, from whence he may bid his people eat, drink, and take their ease, for they have much goods laid up for many years?——

Bank over bank of earth and stone, cleft by deep embrasures, from which the great guns grin across the rich gardens, studded with standard fruit-trees, which close the glacis to its topmost edge. And there, below him, lie the vineyards: every rock-ledge and narrow path of soil tossing its golden tendrils to the sun, grey with ripening clusters, rich with noble wine; but what is that wall which winds among them, up and down, creeping and sneaking over every ledge and knoll of vantage ground, pierced with eyelet-holes, backed by strange stairs and galleries of stone; till it rises close before him, to meet the low round tower full in his path, from whose deep casemates, as from dark scowling eye-holes, the ugly cannon-eyes stare up the glen?

Stangrave knows them all—as far as any man can know. The wards of the key which locks apart the nations; the yet maiden Troy of Europe; the greatest fortress of the world.

He walks down, turns into the vineyards, and lies down beneath the mellow shade of vines. He has no sketch-book—article forbidden; his passport is in his pocket; and he speaks all tongues of German men. So, fearless of gendarmes and soldiers, he lies down, in the blazing German afternoon, upon the shaly soil; and watches the bright-eyed lizards hunt flies

along the roasting walls, and the great locusts buzz and pitch and leap; green locusts with red wings, and grey locusts with blue wings; he notes the species, for he is tired and lazy, and has so many thoughts within his head, that he is glad to toss them all away, and give up his soul, if possible, to locusts and lizards, vines and shade.

And far below him fleets the mighty Rhine, rich with the memories of two thousand stormy years; and on its further bank the grey-walled Coblentz town, and the long arches of the Moselle-bridge, and the rich flats of Kaiser Franz, and the long poplar-crested uplands, which look so gay, and are so stern; for everywhere between the poplar-stems the saw-toothed outline of the western forts cuts the blue sky.

And far beyond it all sleeps, high in air, the Eifel with its hundred crater peaks; blue mound behind blue mound, melting into white haze.—Stangrave has walked upon those hills, and stood upon the crater-lip of the great Moselkopf, and dreamed beside the Laacher See, beneath the ancient abbey walls; and his thoughts flit across the Moselle flats towards his ancient haunts, as he asks himself—How long has that old Eifel lain in such soft sleep? How long ere it awake again?

It may awake, geologists confess,—why not? and blacken all the skies with smoke of Tophet, pouring its streams of boiling mud once more to dam the Rhine, whelming the works of men in flood, and ash, and fire. Why not? The old earth seems so solid at first sight: but look a little nearer, and this is the stuff of which she is made!—The wreck of past earthquakes, the leavings of old floods, the washings of cold cinder heaps—which are smouldering still below.

Stangrave knew that well enough. He had climbed Vesuvius, Etna, Popocatepetl. He had felt many an earthquake shock; and knew how far to trust the everlasting hills. And was old David right, he thought that day, when he held the earthquake and the volcano as the truest symbols of the history of human kind, and of the dealings of their Maker with them? All the magnificent Plutonic imagery of the Hebrew poets, had it no meaning for men now? Did the Lord still uncover the foundations of the world, spiritual as well as physical, with the breath of his displeasure? Was the solfa-tara of Tophet still ordained for tyrants? And did the Lord still arise out of his place to shake terribly the earth? Or, had the moral world grown as sleepy as the physical one had seemed to have done? Would anything awful, unexpected, tragical, ever burst forth again from the heart of earth, or from the heart of man?

Surprising question! What can ever happen henceforth, save infinite railroads and crystal palaces, peace and plenty, cockaigne

and dilettantism, to the end of time? Is it not full sixty whole years since the first French revolution, and six whole years since the revolution of all Europe? Bah!—change is a thing of the past, and tragedy a myth of our forefathers; war a bad habit of old barbarians, eradicated by the spread of an enlightened philanthropy. Men know now how to govern the world far too well to need any divine visitations, much less divine punishments; and Stangrave was an Utopian dreamer, only to be excused by the fact that he had in his pocket the news that three great nations were gone forth to tear each other as of yore.

Nevertheless, looking round upon those grim earth-mounds and embrasures, he could not but give the men who put them there credit for supposing that they might be wanted. Ah! but that might be only one of the direful necessities of the decaying civilization of the old world. What a contrast to the unarmed and peaceful prosperity of his own country! Thank heaven, New England needed no fortresses, military roads, or standing armies! True, but why that flush of contemptuous pity for the poor old world, which could only hold its own by such expensive and ugly methods?

He asked himself that very question, a moment after, angrily; for he was out of humour with himself, with his country, and indeed with the universe in general. And across his mind flashed a memorable conversation at Constantinople long since, during which he had made some such unwise remark to Thurnall, and received from him a sharp answer, which parted them for years.

It was natural enough that that conversation should come back to him just then; for, in his jealousy, he was thinking of Tom Thurnall often enough every day; and in spite of his enmity, he could not help suspecting more and more that Thurnall had had some right on his side of the quarrel.

He had been twitting Thurnall with the miserable condition of the labourers in the south of England, and extolling his own country at the expense of ours. Tom, unable to deny the fact, had waxed all the more wroth at having it pressed on him; and at last had burst forth—

"Well, and what right have you to crow over us on that score? I suppose, if you could hire a man in America for eighteen-pence a day, instead of a dollar and a half, you would do it? You Americans are not accustomed to give more for a thing than it's worth in the market, are you?"

"But," Stangrave had answered, "the glory of America is, that you cannot get the man for less than the dollar and a half; that he is too well fed, too prosperous, too well educated, to be made a slave of."

"And therefore makes slaves of the niggers instead? I'll tell you what, I'm sick of that shallow fallacy—the glory of America! Do you mean by America, the country, or the people? You boast, all of you, of your country, as if you had made it yourselves; and quite forget that God made America, and America has made you."

"Made us, Sir?" quoth Stangrave fiercely enough.

"Made you!" replied Thurnall, exaggerating his half truth from anger. "To what is your comfort, your high feeding, your very education, owing, but to your having a thin population, a virgin soil, and unlimited means of emigration? What credit to you if you need no poor laws, when you pack off your children, as fast as they grow up, to clear more ground westward? What credit to your yeomen that they have read more books than our clods have, while they can earn more in four hours than our poor fellows in twelve? It all depends on the mere physical fact of your being in a new country, and we in an old one: and as for moral superiority, I shan't believe in that while I see the whole of the northern states so utterly given up to the 'almighty dollar,' that they leave the honour of their country to be made ducks and drakes of by a few southern slave-holders. Moral superiority? We hold in England that an honest man is a match for three rogues. If the same law holds good in the United States, I leave you to settle whether Northerners or Southerners are the honester men."

Whereupon (and no shame to Stangrave) there was a heavy quarrel, and the two men had not met since.

But now, those words of Thurnall's, backed by far bitterer ones of Marie's, were fretting Stangrave's heart.—What if they were true? They were not the whole truth. There was beside, and above them all, a nobleness in the American heart, which could, if it chose, and when it chose, give the lie to that bitter taunt: but had it done so already?

At least, he himself had not. . . . If Thurnall and Marie were unjust to his nation, they had not been unjust to him. He, at least, had been making, all his life, mere outward blessings causes of self-congratulation, and not of humility. He had been priding himself on wealth, ease, luxury, cultivation, without a thought that these were God's gifts, and that God would require an account of them. If Thurnall were right, was he himself too truly the typical American? And bitterly enough he accused at once himself and his people.

"Noble? Marie is right! We boast of our nobleness: better to take the only opportunity of showing it which we have had since we have become a nation! Heaped with every blessing which God could give; beyond the reach of sorrow, a

check, even an interference; shut out from all the world in God's new Eden, that we might freely eat of all the trees of the garden, and grow and spread, and enjoy ourselves like the birds of heaven—God only laid on us one duty, one command, to right one simple, confessed, conscious wrong. . . .

"And what have we done?—what have even I done? We have steadily, deliberately cringed at the feet of the wrong-doer, even while we boasted our superiority to him at every point, and at last, for the sake of our own selfish ease, helped him to forge new chains for his victims, and received as our only reward fresh insults. White slaves? We, perhaps, and not the English peasant, are the white slaves! At least, if the Irishman emigrates to England, or the Englishman to Canada, he is not hunted out with blood-hounds, and delivered back to his landlord to be scourged and chained. He is not practically out of the pale of law, unrepresented, forbidden even the use of books; and even if he were, there is an excuse for the old country; for she was founded on no political principles, but discovered what she knows step by step—a sort of political Topsy, as Claude Mellot calls her, who has 'kinder growed,' doing from hand to mouth what seemed best. But that we, who profess to start as an ideal nation, on fixed ideas of justice, freedom, and equality—that we should have been stultifying ever since every great principle of which we so loudly boast!——"

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"The old Jew used to say of his nation, 'It is God that hath made us, and not we ourselves.' We say, 'It is we that have made ourselves, while God——?'—Ah, yes; I recollect. God's work is to save a soul here and a soul there, and to leave America to be saved by the Americans who made it. We must have a broader and deeper creed than that if we are to work out our destiny. The battle against Middle Age slavery was fought by the old Catholic Church, which held the Jewish notion, and looked on the Deity as the actual King of Christendom, and every man in it as God's own child. I see now!—No wonder that the battle in America has as yet been fought by the Quakers, who believe that there is a divine light and voice in every man; while the Calvinist preachers, with their isolating and individualizing creed, have looked on with folded hands, content to save a negro's soul here and there, whatsoever might become of the bodies and the national future of the whole negro race. No wonder, while such men have the teaching of the people, that it is necessary still in the nineteenth century, in a Protestant country, amid sane human beings, for such a man as Mr. Sumner to rebut, in sober earnest, the argument that the negro was the

descendant of Canaan, doomed to eternal slavery by Noah's curse!"

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He would rouse himself. He would act, speak, write, as many a noble fellow-countryman was doing. He had avoided them of old as bores and fanatics who would needs wake him from his luxurious dreams. He had even hated them, simply because they were more righteous than he. He would be a new man henceforth.

He strode down the hill through the cannon-guarded vineyards, among the busy groups of peasants.

"Yes, Marie was right. Life is meant for work, and not for ease; to labour in danger and in dread; to do a little good ere the night comes, when no man can work: instead of trying to realize for one-self a Paradise; not even Bunyan's shepherd-paradise, much less Fourier's Casino-paradise; and perhaps least of all, because most selfish and isolated of all, my own heart-paradise—the apotheosis of loafing, as Claude calls it. Ah, Tennyson's Palace of Art is a true word—too true, too true!

"Art? What if the most necessary human art, next to the art of agriculture, be, after all, the art of war? It has been so in all ages. What if I have been befooled—what if all the Anglo-Saxon world has been befooled by forty years of peace? We have forgotten that the history of the world has been as yet written in blood; that the story of the human race is the story of its heroes and its martyrs—the slayers and the slain. Is it not becoming such once more in Europe now? And what divine exemption can we claim from the law? What right have we to suppose that it will be aught else, as long as there are wrongs unredressed on earth; as long as anger and ambition, cupidity and wounded pride, canker the hearts of men? What if the wise man's attitude, and the wise nation's attitude, is that of the Jews rebuilding their ruined walls,—the tool in one hand, and the sword in the other; for the wild Arabs are close outside, and the time is short, and the storm has only lulled awhile in mercy, that wise men may prepare for the next thunder-burst? It is an ugly fact: but I have thrust it away too long, and I must accept it now and henceforth. This, and not luxurious Broadway; this, and not the comfortable New England village, is the normal type of human life; and this is the model city!—Armed industry, which tills the corn and vine among the cannons' mouths; which never forgets their need, though it may mask and beautify their terror: but knows that as long as cruelty and wrong exist on earth, man's destiny is to dare and suffer, and, if it must be so, to die. * * * *

"Yes, I will face my work; my danger, if need be. I will

find Marie. I will tell her that I accept her quest; not for her sake, but for its own. Only I will demand the right to work at it as I think best, patiently, moderately, wisely if I can; for a fanatic I cannot be, even for her sake. She may hate these slaveholders,—she may have her reasons,—but I cannot. I cannot deal with them as *feras naturæ*. I cannot deny that they are no worse men than I; that I should have done what they are doing, have said what they are saying, had I been bred up, as they have been, with irresponsible power over the souls and bodies of human beings. God! I shudder at the fancy! The brute that I might have been—that I should have been!

"Yes; one thing at least I have learnt, in all my experiments on poor humanity;—never to see a man do a wrong thing, without feeling that I could do the same in his place. I used to pride myself on that once, fool that I was, and call it comprehensiveness. I used to make it an excuse for sitting by, and seeing the devil have it all his own way, and call that toleration. I will see now whether I cannot turn the said knowledge to a better account, as common sense, patience, and charity; and yet do work of which neither I nor my country need be ashamed."

He walked down, and on to the bridge of boats. They opened in the centre; as he reached it a steamer was passing. He lounged on the rail as the boat passed through, looking carelessly at the groups of tourists.

Two ladies were standing on the steamer; close to him; looking up at Ehrenbreitstein. Was it?—yes, it was Sabina, and Marie by her!

But ah, how changed! The cheeks were pale and hollow; dark rings—he could see them but too plainly as the face was lifted up toward the light—were round those great eyes, bright no longer. Her face was listless, careworn; looking all the more sad and impassive by the side of Sabina's, as she pointed, smiling and sparkling, up to the fortress; and seemed trying to interest Marie in it, but in vain.

He called out. He waved his hand wildly, to the amusement of the officers and peasants who waited by his side; and who, looking first at his excited face, and then at the two beautiful women, were not long in making up their minds about him; and had their private jests accordingly.

They did not see him, but turned away to look at Coblentz; and the steamer swept by.

Stangrave stamped with rage—upon a Prussian officer's thin boot.

"Ten thousand pardons!"

"You are excused, dear Sir, you are excused," says the good-natured German, with a wicked smile, which raises a blush on

Stangrave's cheek. "Your eyes were dazzled; why not? it is not often that one sees two such suns together in the same sky. But calm yourself; the boat stops at Coblentz."

Stangrave could not well call the man of war to account for his impertinence; he had had his toes half crushed, and had a right to indemnify himself as he thought fit. And with a hundred more apologies, Stangrave prepared to dart across the bridge as soon as it was closed.

Alas! after the steamer, as the fates would have it, came lumbering down one of those monster timber rafts; and it was a full half hour before Stangrave could get across, having suffered all the while the torments of Tantalus, as he watched the boat sweep round to the pier, and discharge its freight, to be scattered whither he knew not. At last he got across, and went in chase to the nearest hotel: but they were not there; thence to the next, and the next, till he had hunted half the hotels in the town; but hunted all in vain.

He is rushing wildly back again, to try if he can obtain any clue at the steam-boat pier, through the narrow, dirty street at the back of the Rhine Cavalier, when he is stopped short by a mighty German embrace, and a German kiss on either cheek, as the kiss of a housemaid's broom; while a jolly voice shouts in English:—

"Ah, my dear, dear friend! and you would pass me! Whither the hangman so fast are you running in the mud!"

"My dear Salomon! But let me go, I beseech you; I am in search—"

"In search?" cries the jolly Jew banker,—"for the philosopher's stone? You had all that man could want a week since, except that. Search no more, but come home with me; and we will have a night as of the gods on Olympus!"

"My dearest fellow, I am looking for two ladies!"

"Two? ah, rogue! shall not one suffice?"

"Don't, my dearest fellow! I am looking for two English ladies."

"Potz! You shall find two hundred in the hotels, ugly and fair; but the two fairest are gone this two hours."

"When?—which?" cries Stangrave, suspecting at once.

"Sabina Mellot, and a Sultana—I thought her of The Nation, and would have offered my hand on the spot: but Madame Mellot says she is a Gentile."

"Gone? And you have seen them! Where?"

"To Bertrich. They had luncheon with my mother, and then started by private post."

"I must follow."

"*Ach lieber?* But it will be dark in an hour."

"What matter?"

"But you shall find them to-morrow, just as well as to-day. They stay at Bertrich for a fortnight more. They have been there now a month, and only left it last week for a pleasure tour, across to the Ahrthal, and so back by Andernach."

"Why did they leave Coblentz, then, in such hot haste?"

"Ah, the ladies never give reasons. There were letters waiting for them at our house: and no sooner read, but they leaped up, and would forth. Come home now, and go by the steamer to-morrow morning."

"Impossible! most hospitable of Israelites."

"To go to-night,—for see the clouds!—Not a postilion will dare to leave Coblentz, under that quick-coming *allgemein und ungeheuer henker-hund-und-teufel's-gewitter.*"

Stangrave looked up, growling; and gave in. A Rhine-storm was rolling up rapidly.

"They will be caught in it."

"No. They are far beyond its path by now; while you shall endure the whole visitation; and if you try to proceed, pass the night in a flea-pestered post-house, or in a ditch of water."

So Stangrave went home with Herr Salomon, and heard from him, amid clouds of Latakia, of wars and rumours of wars, distress of nations, and perplexity, seen by the light, not of the Gospel, but of the stock-exchange; while the storm fell without in lightning, hail, rain, of right Rhenish potency.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE THIRTIETH OF SEPTEMBER.

We must go back a week or so, to England, and to the last day of September. The world is shooting partridges, and asking nervously, when it comes home, what news from the Crimea? The flesh who serves it is bathing at Margate. The devil is keeping up his usual correspondence with both. Eaton Square is a desolate wilderness, where dusty sparrows alone disturb the dreams of frowzy charwomen, who, like Anchorites amid the tombs of the Thebaid, fulfil the contemplative life each in her subterranean cell. Beneath St. Peter's spire the cabman sleeps within his cab, the horse without: the waterman, seated on his empty bucket, contemplates the untrodden pavement between his feet, and is at rest. The blue butcher's boy trots by, with empty cart, five miles an hour, instead of full fifteen, and stops to chat with the red postman, who, his occupation gone, smokes with the green gatekeeper, and reviles the Czar. Along the

whole north pavement of the square only one figure moves, and that is Major Campbell.

His face is haggard and anxious; he walks with a quick, excited step; earnest enough, whoever else is not. For in front of Lord Scoutbush's house the road is laid with straw. There is sickness there, anxiety, bitter tears. Lucia has not found her husband, but she has lost her child.

Trembling, Campbell raises the muffled knocker, and Bowie appears. "What news to-day?" he whispers.

"As well as can be expected, Sir, and as quiet as a lamb now, they say. But it has been a bad time, and a bad man is he that caused it."

"A bad time, and a bad man. How is Miss St. Just?"

"Just gone to lie down, Sir. Mrs. Clara is on the stairs, if you'd like to see her."

"No; tell Miss St. Just that I have no news yet." And the Major turns wearily away.

Clara, who has seen him from above, hurries down after him into the street, and coaxes him to come in. "I am sure you have had no breakfast, Sir; and you look so ill and worn. And Miss St. Just will be so vexed not to see you. She will get up the moment she hears you are here."

"No, my good Miss Clara," says Campbell, looking down with a weary smile. "I should only make gloom more gloomy. Bowie, tell his lordship that I shall be at the afternoon train to-morrow, let what will happen."

"Ay, ay, Sir. We're a' ready to march. The Major looks very ill, Miss Clara. I wish he'd have taken your counsel. And I wish ye'd take mine, and marry me ere I march, just to try what it's like."

"I must mind my mistress, Mr. Bowie," says Clara.

"And how should I interfere with that, as I've said twenty times, when I'm safe in the Crimea? I'll get the licence this day, say what ye will: and then ye would not have the heart to let me spend two pounds twelve and sixpence for nothing."

Whether the last most Caledonian argument conquered or not, Mr. Bowie got the licence, was married before breakfast the next morning, and started for the Crimea at four o'clock in the afternoon; most astonished, as he confided in the train to Sergeant MacArthur, "to see a lassie that never gave him a kind word in her life, and had not been married but barely six hours, greet and greet at his going, till she vanished away into hystericals. They're a very unfathomable species, Sergeant, are they women; and if they were taken out o' man, they took the best part o' Adam wi' them, and left us to shift with the worse."

But to return to Campbell. The last week has altered him

frightfully. He is no longer the stern, self-possessed warrior which he was; he no longer even walks upright; his cheek is pale, his eye dull; his whole countenance sunken together. And now that the excitement of anxiety is past, he draws his feet along the pavement slowly, his hands clasped behind him, his eyes fixed on the ground, as if the life was gone from out of him, and existence was a heavy weight.

"She is safe, at least, then! One burden off my mind. And yet had it not been better if that pure spirit had returned to Him who gave it, instead of waking again to fresh misery? I must find that man! Why, I have been saying so to myself for seven days past, and yet no ray of light. Can the coward have given me a wrong address? Yet why give me an address at all if he meant to hide from me? Why, I have been saying that too, to myself every day for the last week! Over and over again the same dreary round of possibilities and suspicions. However, I must be quiet now, if I am a man. I can hear nothing before the detective comes at two. How to pass the weary, weary time? For I am past thinking—almost past praying—though not quite, thank God!"

He paces up still noisy Piccadilly, and then up silent Bond Street; pauses to look at some strange fish on Groves's counter—anything to while away the time; then he plods on toward the top of the street, and turns into Mr. Pillischer's shop, and upstairs to the microscopic club-room. There, at least, he can forget himself for an hour.

He looks round the neat pleasant little place, with its cases of curiosities, and its exquisite photographs, and bright brass instruments; its glass vases stocked with delicate water-plants and animalcules, with the sunlight gleaming through the green and purple seaweed fronds, while the air is fresh and fragrant with the seaweed scent; a quiet, cool little hermitage of science amid that great, noisy, luxurious west-end world. At least, it brings back to him the thought of the summer sea, and Aberalva, and his shore-studies: but he cannot think of that any more. It is past; and may God forgive him!

At one of the microscopes on the slab opposite him stands a sturdy bearded man, his back toward the Major; while the wise little German, hopeless of customers, is leaning over him in his shirt sleeves.

"But I never have seen its like; it had just like a painter's easel in its stomach yesterday!"

"Why, it's an Echinus Larva; a sucking sea-urchin! Hang it, if I had known you hadn't seen one, I'd have brought up half-a-dozen of them!"

"May I look, Sir?" asked the Major; "I, too, never have seen an Echinus Larva."

The bearded man looks up.

"Major Campbell!"

"Mr. Thurnall! I thought I could not be mistaken in the voice."

"This is too pleasant, Sir, to renew our watery loves together here," said Tom: but a second look at the Major's face showed him that he was in no jesting mood. "How is the party at Beddgelert? I fancied you with them still."

"They are all in London, at Lord Scoutbush's house, in Eaton Square."

"In London, at this dull time? I trust nothing unpleasant has brought them here."

"Mrs. Vavasour is very ill. We had thoughts of sending for you, as the family physician was out of town: but she was out of danger, thank God, in a few hours. Now let me ask in turn after you. I hope no unpleasant business brings you up three hundred miles from your practice?"

"Nothing, I assure you. Only I have given up my Aberalva practice. I am going to the East."

"Like the rest of the world."

"Not exactly. You go as a dignified soldier of her Majesty's; I as an undignified Abel Drugger, to dose Bashi-Bazouks."

"Impossible! and with such an opening as you had there! You must excuse me; but my opinion of your prudence must not be so rudely shaken."

"Why do you not ask the question which Balzac's old Tourangeois judge asks, whenever a culprit is brought before him,—'Who is she?'"

"Taking for granted that there was a woman at the bottom of every mishap? I understand you," said the Major, with a sad smile. "Now, let you and I walk a little together, and look at the Echinoid another day—or when I return from Sevastopol—"

Tom went out with him. A new ray of hope had crossed the Major's mind. His meeting with Thurnall might be providential; for he recollected now, for the first time, Mellot's parting hint.

"You knew Elsley Vavasour well?"

"No man better."

"Did you think that there was any tendency to madness in him?"

"No more than in any other selfish, vain, irritable man, with a strong imagination left to run riot."

"Humph! you seem to have divined his character. May I ask if you knew him before you met him at Aberalva?"

Tom looked up sharply in the Major's face.

"You would ask, what cause I have for inquiring? I will

tell you presently. Meanwhile I may say, that Mellot told me frankly that you had some power over him; and mentioned, mysteriously, a name—John Briggs, I think—which it appears that he once assumed."

"If Mellot thought fit to tell you anything, I may frankly tell you all. John Briggs is his real name. I have known him from childhood." And then Tom poured into the ears of the surprised and somewhat disgusted Major all he had to tell.

"You have kept your secret mercifully, and used it wisely, Sir; and I and others shall be always your debtors for it. Now I dare tell you in turn, in strictest confidence of course——"

"I am far too poor to afford the luxury of babbling."

And the Major told him what we all know.

"I expected as much," said he dryly. "Now, I suppose that you wish me to exert myself in finding the man?"

"I do."

"Were Mrs. Vavasour only concerned, I should say—Not I! Better that she should never set eyes on him again."

"Better, indeed!" said he bitterly: "but it is I who must see him, if but for five minutes. I must!"

"Major Campbell's wish is a command. Where have you searched for him?"

"At his address, at his publisher's, at the houses of various literary friends of his, and yet no trace."

"Has he gone to the Continent?"

"Heaven knows! I have inquired at every passport office for news of any one answering his description; indeed, I have two detectives, I may tell you, at this moment, watching every possible place. There is but one hope, if he be alive. Can he have gone home to his native town?"

"Never! Anywhere but there."

"Is there any old friend of the lower class with whom he may have taken lodgings?"

Tom pondered.

"There was a fellow, a noisy blackguard, whom Briggs was asking after this very summer—a fellow who went off from Whitbury with some players. I know Briggs used to go to the theatre with him as a boy—what was his name? He tried acting, but did not succeed; and then became a scene-shifter, or something of the kind, at the Adelphi. He has some complaint, I forget what, which made him an out-patient at St. Mumpsimus's, some months every year. I know that he was there this summer, for I wrote to ask, at Briggs's request, and Briggs sent him a sovereign through me."

"But what makes you fancy that he can have taken shelter with such a man, and one who knows his secret?"

"It is but a chance: but he may have done it from the mere feeling of loneliness—just to hold by some one whom he knows in this great wilderness; especially a man in whose eyes he will be a great man, and to whom he has done a kindness; still, it is the merest chance."

"We will take it, nevertheless, forlorn hope though it be."

They took a cab to the hospital, and, with some trouble, got the man's name and address, and drove in search of him. They had some difficulty in finding his abode, for it was up an alley at the back of Drury Lane, in the top of one of those foul old houses which hold a family in every room; but, by dint of knocking at one door and the other, and bearing meekly much reviling consequent thereon, they arrived, "*per modum tollendi*," at a door which must be the right one, as all the rest were wrong.

"Does John Barker live here?" asks Thurnall, putting his head in cautiously for fear of drunken Irishmen, who might be seized with the national impulse to "slate" him.

"What's that to you?" answers a shrill voice from among soapsuds and steaming rags.

"Here is a gentleman wants to speak to him."

"So do a many as won't have that pleasure, and would be little the better for it if they had. Get along with you, I knows your lay."

"We really want to speak to him, and to pay him, if he will—"

"Go along! I'm up to the something to your advantage dodge, and to the mustachio dodge too. Do you fancy I don't know a bailiff, because he's dress'd like a swell?"

"But, my good woman!" said Tom, laughing.

"You put your crocodile foot in here, and I'll hit the hot water over the both of you!" and she caught up the pan of soapsuds.

"My dear soul! I am a doctor belonging to the hospital which your husband goes to; and have known him since he was a boy, down in Berkshire."

"You?" and she looked keenly at him.

"My name is Thurnall. I was a medical man once in Whitbury, where your husband was born."

"You?" said she again, in a softened tone. "I knows that name well enough."

"You do? What was your name, then?" said Tom, who recognised the woman's Berkshire accent beneath its coat of cockneyism.

"Never you mind: I'm no credit to it, so I'll let it be. But come in, for the old county's sake. Can't offer you a chair, he's

pawned 'em all. Pleasant old place it was down there, when I was a young girl; they say it's grow'd a grand place now, wi' a railroad. I think many times I'd like to go down and die there." She spoke in a rough, sullen, careless tone, as if life-weary.

"My good woman," said Major Campbell, a little impatiently, "can you find your husband for us?"

"Why, then?" asked she sharply, her suspicion seeming to return.

"If he will answer a few questions, I will give him five shillings. If he can find out for I me what I want, I will give him five pounds."

"Shouldn't I do as well? If you gi' it he, it's little out of it I shall see, but he coming home tipsy when it's spent. Ah, dear! it was a sad day for me when I first fell in with they play-goers!"

"Why should she not do it as well?" said Thurnall. "Mrs. Barker, do you know anything of a person named Briggs—John Briggs, the apothecary's son, at Whitbury?"

She laughed a harsh bitter laugh.

"Know he? yes, and too much reason. That was where it all begun, along of that play-going of he's and my master's."

"Have you seen him lately?" asked Campbell, eagerly.

"I seen 'un? I'd hit this water over the fellow, and all his play-acting merryandrews, if ever he sot a foot here!"

"But have you heard of him?"

"Ees—" said she carelessly; "he's round here now, I heard my master say, about the 'Delphy, with my master: a drinking, I suppose. No good, I'll warrant."

"My good woman," said Campbell, panting for breath, "bring me face to face with that man, and I'll put a five-pound note in your hand there and then."

"Five pounds is a sight to me: but it's a sight more than the sight of he's worth," said she suspiciously again.

"That's the gentleman's concern," said Tom. "The money's yours. I suppose you know the worth of it by now?"

"Ees, none better. But I don't want he to get hold of it; he's made away with enough already;" and she began to think.

"Curiously impassive people, we Wessex worthies, when we are a little ground down with trouble. You must give her time, and she will do our work. She wants the money, but she is long past being excited at the prospect of it."

"What's that you're whispering?" asked she sharply.

Campbell stamped with impatience.

"You don't trust us yet, eh?—then, there!" and he took five sovereigns from his pocket, and tossed them on the table.

"There's your money! I trust you to do the work, as you've been paid beforehand."

She caught up the gold, rang every piece on the table to see if it was sound; and then—

"Sally, you go down with these gentlemen to the Jonson's Head, and if he ben't there, go to the Fighting Cocks; and if he ben't there, go to the Duke of Wellington; and tell he there's two gentlemen has heard of his poetry, and wants to hear 'un excite. And then you give he a glass of liquor, and praise up his nonsense, and he'll tell you all he knows, and a sight more. Gi' un plenty to drink. It'll be a saving and a charity, for if he don't get it out of you, he will out of me."

And she returned doggedly to her washing.

"Can't I do anything for you?" asked Tom, whose heart always yearned over a Berkshire soul. "I have plenty of friends down at Whitbury still."

"More than I have. No, Sir," said she sadly, and with the first touch of sweetness they had yet heard in her voice. "I've cured my own bacon, and I must eat it. There's none down there minds me, but them that would be ashamed of me. And I couldn't go without he, and they wouldn't take he in; so I must just bide." And she went on washing.

"God help her!" said Campbell, as he went down-stairs.

"Misery breeds that temper, and only misery, in our people. I can show you as thorough gentlemen and ladies, people round Whitbury, living on ten shillings a week, as you will show me in Belgravia living on five thousand a year."

"I don't doubt it," said Campbell. . . . "So 'she couldn't go without he,' drunken dog as he is! Thus it is with them all the world over."

"So much the worse for them," said Tom cynically, "and for the men too. They make fools of us first with our over-fondness of them; and then they let us make fools of ourselves with their over-fondness of us."

"I fancy sometimes that they were all meant to be the mates of angels, and stooped to men as a *pis aller;* reversing the old story of the sons of heaven and the daughters of men."

"And accounting for the present degeneracy. When the sons of heaven married the daughters of men, their offspring were giants and men of renown. Now the sons of men marry the daughters of heaven, and the offspring is Wiggle, Waggle, Windbag, and Redtape."

They visited one public-house after another, till the girl found for them the man they wanted, a shabby, sodden-visaged fellow, with a would-be jaunty air of conscious shrewdness and vanity, who stood before the bar, his thumbs in his armholes, and laying

down the law to a group of coster-boys, for want of a better audience.

The girl, after sundry plucks at his coat-tail, stopped him in the midst of his oration, and explained her errand somewhat fearfully.

Mr. Barker bent down his head on one side, to signify that he was absorbed in attention to her news; and then drawing himself up once more, lifted his greasy hat high in air, bowed to the very floor, and broke forth:—

> "Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors:
> A man of war, and eke a man of peace—
> That is, if you come peaceful; and if not,
> Have we not Hiren here?"

And the fellow put himself into a fresh attitude.

"We come in peace, my good Sir," said Tom; "first to listen to your talented effusions, and next for a little private conversation on a subject on which—" but Mr. Barker interrupted,—

> "To listen, and to drink? The muse is dry,
> And Pegasus doth thirst for Hippocrene,
> And fain would paint—imbibe the vulgar call—
> Or hot or cold, or long or short—Attendant!"

The bar girl, who knew his humour, came forward.

> "Glasses all round—these noble knights will pay—
> Of hottest hot, and stiffest stiff. Thou mark'st me?
> Now to your quest!"

And he faced round with a third attitude.

"Do you know Mr. Briggs?" asked the straightforward Major.

He rolled his eyes to every quarter of the seventh sphere, clapped his hand upon his heart, and assumed an expression of angelic gratitude:—

> "My benefactor! Were the world a waste,
> A thistle-waste, ass-nibbled, goldfinch-pecked,
> And all the men and women merely asses,
> I still could lay this hand upon this heart,
> And cry, 'not yet alone! I know a man—
> A man Jove-fronted, and Hyperion-curled—
> A gushing, flushing, blushing human heart!'"

"As sure as you live, Sir," said Tom, "if you won't talk honest prose, I won't pay for the brandy and water."

> 'Base is the slave who pays, and baser prose—
> Hang uninspired patter! 'Tis in verse
> That angels praise, and fiends in Limbo curse."

"And asses bray, I think," said Tom, in despair. "Do you know where Mr. Briggs is now?"

> "And why the devil do you want to know?
> For that's a verse, Sir, although somewhat slow."

The two men laughed in spite of themselves.

"Better tell the fellow the plain truth," said Campbell to Thurnall.

"Come out with us, and I will tell you." And Campbell threw down the money, and led him off, after he had gulped down his own brandy, and half Tom's beside.

"What? leave the nepenthe untasted?"

They took him out, and he tucked his arms through theirs, and strutted down Drury Lane.

"The fact is, Sir,—I speak to you, of course, in confidence, as one gentleman to another—"

Mr. Barker replied by a lofty and gracious bow.

"That his family are exceedingly distressed at his absence, and his wife, who, as you may know, is a lady of high family, dangerously ill; and he cannot be aware of the fact. This gentleman is the medical man of her family, and I—I am an intimate friend. We should esteem it therefore the very greatest service if you would give us any information which—"

> "Weep no more, gentle shepherds, weep no more;
> For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,
> Sunk though he be upon a garret floor,
> With fumes of Morpheus' crown about his head."

"Fumes of Morpheus' crown?" asked Thurnall.

> "That crimson flower which crowns the sleepy god,
> And sweeps the soul aloft, though flesh may nod."

"He has taken to opium!" said Thurnall to the bewildered Major. "What I should have expected."

"God help him! we must save him out of that last lowest deep!" cried Campbell. "Where is he, Sir?"

> "A vow! a vow! I have a vow in heaven!
> Why guide the hounds toward the trembling hare?
> Our Adonais hath drunk poison; Oh!
> What deaf and viperous murderer could crown
> Life's early cup with such a draught of woe?"

"As I live, Sir," cried Campbell, losing his self-possession in disgust at the fool; "you may rhyme your own nonsense as long as you will, but you shan't quote the Adonais about that fellow in my presence."

Mr. Barker shook himself fiercely free of Campbell's arm, and

faced round at him in a fighting attitude. Campbell stood eyeing him sternly, but at his wit's end.

"Mr. Barker," said Tom blandly, "will you have another glass of brandy and water, or shall I call a policeman?"

"Sir," sputtered he, speaking prose at last, "this gentleman has insulted me! He has called my poetry nonsense, and my friend a fellow. And blood shall not wipe out—what liquor may!"

The hint was sufficient: but ere he had drained another glass, Mr. Barker was decidedly incapable of managing his affairs, much less theirs; and became withal exceedingly quarrelsome, returning angrily to the grievance of Briggs having been called a fellow; in spite of all their entreaties, he talked himself into a passion, and at last, to Campbell's extreme disgust, rushed out of the bar into the street.

"This is too vexatious! To have kept half-an-hour's company with such an animal, and then to have him escape me after all! A just punishment on me for pandering to his drunkenness."

Tom made no answer, but went quietly to the door, and peeped out.

"Pay for his liquor, Major, and follow. Keep a few yards behind me; there will be less chance of his recognising us than if he saw us both together."

"Why, where do you think he's going?"

"Not home, I can see. Ten to one that he will go raging off straight to Briggs, to put him on his guard against us. Just like a drunkard's cunning it would be. There, he has turned up that side street. Now follow me quick. Oh that he may only keep his legs!"

They gained the bottom of that street before he had turned out of it; and so through another, and another, till they ran him to earth in one of the courts out of St. Martin's Lane.

Into a doorway he went, and up a stair. Tom stood listening at the bottom, till he heard the fellow knock at a door far above, and call out in a drunken tone. Then he beckoned to Campbell, and both, careless of what might follow, ran up-stairs, and pushing him aside, entered the room without ceremony.

Their chances of being on the right scent were small enough, considering that, though every one was out of town, there were a million and a half of people in London at that moment; and, unfortunately, at least fifty thousand who would have considered Mr. John Barker a desirable visitor; but somehow, in the excitement of the chase, both had forgotten the chances against them, and the probability that they would have to retire downstairs again, apologising humbly to some wrathful Joseph Buggins, whose convivialities they might have interrupted. But no;

Tom's cunning had, as usual, played him true; and as they entered the door, they beheld none other than the lost Elsley Vavasour, alias John Briggs.

Major Campbell advanced bowing, hat in hand, with a courteous apology on his lips.

It was a low lean-to garret; there was a deal table and an old chair in it, but no bed. The windows were broken; the paper hanging down in strips. Elsley was standing before the empty fire-place, his hand in his bosom, as if he had been startled by the scuffle outside. He had not shaved for some days.

So much Tom could note; but no more. He saw the glance of recognition pass over Elsley's face, and that an ugly one. He saw him draw something from his bosom, and spring like a cat almost upon the table. A flash—a crack. He had fired a pistol full in Campbell's face.

Tom was startled, not at the thing, but that such a man should have done it. He had seen souls, and too many, flit out of the world by that same tiny crack, in Californian taverns, Arabian deserts, Australian gullies. He knew all about that: but he liked Campbell; and he breathed more freely the next moment, when he saw him standing still erect, a quiet smile on his face, and felt the plaister dropping from the wall upon his own head. The bullet had gone over the Major. All was right.

"He is not man enough for a second shot," thought Tom quietly, "while the Major's eye is on him."

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Vavasour," he heard the Major say, in a gentle unmoved voice, "for this intrusion. I assure you that there is no cause for any anger on your part; and I am come to entreat you to forget and forgive any conduct of mine which may have caused you to mistake either me or a lady whom I am unworthy to mention."

"I am glad the beggar fired at him," thought Tom. "One spice of danger, and he's himself again, and will overawe the poor cur by mere civility. I was afraid of some abject methodist parson humility, which would give the other party a handle."

Elsley heard him with a stupified look, like that of a trapped wild beast, in which rage, shame, suspicion, and fear, were mingled with the vacant glare of the opium-eater's eye. Then his eye drooped beneath Campbell's steady gentle gaze, and he looked uneasily round the room, still like a trapped wild beast, as if for a hole to escape by; then up again, but sidelong, at Major Campbell.

"I assure you, Sir, on the word of a Christian and a soldier, that you are labouring under an entire misapprehension. For God's sake and Mrs. Vavasour's sake, come back, Sir, to those

who will receive you with nothing but affection! Your wife has been all but dead; she thinks of no one but you, asks for no one but you. In God's name, Sir, what are you doing here, while a wife who adores you is dying from your—I do not wish to be rude, Sir, but let me say at least—neglect?"

Elsley looked at him still askance, puzzled, inquiring. Suddenly his great beautiful eyes opened to preternatural wideness, as if trying to grasp a new thought. He started, shifted his feet to and fro, his arms straight down by his sides, his fingers clutching after something. Then he looked up hurriedly again at Campbell; and Thurnall looked at him also; and his face was as the face of an angel.

"Miserable ass!" thought Tom, "if he don't see innocence in that man's countenance, he wouldn't see it in his own child's."

Elsley suddenly turned his back to them, and thrust his hand into his bosom. Now was Tom's turn.

In a moment he had vaulted over the table, and seized Elsley's wrist, ere he could draw the second pistol.

"No, my dear Jack," whispered he quietly, "once is enough in a day!"

"Not for him, Tom, for myself!" moaned Elsley.

"For neither, dear lad! Let bygones be bygones, and do you be a new man, and go home to Mrs. Vavasour."

"Never, never, never, never, never, never!" shrieked Elsley like a baby, every word increasing in intensity, till the whole house rang; and then threw himself into the crazy chair, and dashed his head between his hands upon the table.

"This is a case for me, Major Campbell. I think you had better go now."

"You will not leave him?"

"No, Sir. It is a very curious psychological study, and he is a Whitbury man."

Campbell knew quite enough of the would-be cynical doctor, to understand what all that meant. He came up to Elsley.

"Mr. Vavasour, I am going to the war, from which I expect never to return. If you believe me, give me your hand before I go."

Elsley, without lifting his head, beat on the table with his hand.

"I wish to die at peace with you and all the world. I am innocent in word, in thought. I shall not insult another person by saying that she is so. If you believe me, give me your hand."

Elsley stretched his hand, his head still buried. Campbell took it, and went silently down-stairs.

"Is he gone?" moaned he, after a while.

"Yes."

"Does she—does she care for him?"

"Good heavens! How did you ever dream such an absurdity?" Elsley only beat upon the table.

"She has been ill?"

"Is ill. She has lost her child."

"Which?" shrieked Elsley.

"A boy whom she should have had."

Elsley only beat on the table; then—

"Give me the bottle, Tom!"

"What bottle?"

"The laudanum;—there in the cupboard."

"I shall do no such thing. You are poisoning yourself."

"Let me then! I must, I tell you! I can live on nothing else. I shall go mad if I do not have it. I should have been mad by now. Nothing else keeps off these fits;—I feel one coming now. Curse you! give me the bottle!"

"What fits?"

"How do I know? Agony and torture—ever since I got wet on that mountain."

Tom knew enough to guess his meaning, and felt Elsley's pulse and forehead.

"I tell you it turns every bone to red-hot iron!" almost screamed he.

"Neuralgia; rheumatic, I suppose," said Tom to himself. "Well, this is not the thing to cure you: but you shall have it to keep you quiet." And he measured him out a small dose.

"More, I tell you, more!" said Elsley, lifting up his head, and looking at it.

"Not more while you are with me."

"With you! Who the devil sent you here?"

"John Briggs, John Briggs, if I did not mean you good, should I be here now? Now do, like a reasonable man, tell me what you intend to do."

"What is that to you, or any man?" said Elsley, writhing with neuralgia.

"No concern of mine, of course: but your poor wife—you must see her."

"I can't, I won't!—that is, not yet! I tell you I cannot face the thought of her, much less the sight of her, and her family,—that Valencia! I'd rather the earth should open and swallow me! Don't talk to me, I say!"

And hiding his face in his hands, he writhed with pain, while Thurnall stood still patiently watching him, as a pointer dog does a partridge. He had found his game, and did not intend to lose it.

"I am better now; quite well!" said he, as the laudanum began to work. "Yes! I'll go—that will be it—go to * * * * at once. He'll give me an order for a magazine article; I'll earn ten pounds, and then off to Italy."

"If you want ten pounds, my good fellow, you can have them without racking your brains over an article."

Elsley looked up proudly.

"I do not borrow, Sir!"

"Well—I'll give you five for those pistols. They are of no use to you, and I shall want a spare brace for the East."

"Ah! I forgot them. I spent my last money on them," said he with a shudder; "but I won't sell them to you at a fancy price—no dealings between gentleman and gentleman. I'll go to a shop, and get for them what they are worth."

"Very good. I'll go with you, if you like. I fancy I may get you a better price for them than you would yourself: being rather a knowing one about the pretty little barkers." And Tom took his arm, and walked him quietly down into the street.

"If you ever go up those kennel-stairs again, friend," said he to himself, "my name's not Tom Thurnall."

They walked to a gunsmith's shop in the Strand, where Tom had often dealt, and sold the pistols for some three pounds.

"Now then let's go into 333, and get a mutton chop."

"No."

Elsley was too shy; he was "not fit to be seen."

"Come to my rooms, then, in the Adelphi, and have a wash and a shave. It will make you as fresh as a lark again, and then we'll send out for the eatables, and have a quiet chat."

Elsley did not say no. Thurnall took the thing as a matter of course, and he was too weak and tired to argue with him. Beside, there was a sort of relief in the company of a man who, though he knew all, chatted on to him cheerily and quietly, as if nothing had happened; who at least treated him as a sane man. From any one else he would have shrunk, lest they should find him out: but a companion, who knew the worst, at least saved him suspicion and dread. His weakness, now that the collapse after passion had come on, clung to any human friend. The very sound of Tom's clear sturdy voice seemed pleasant to him, after long solitude and silence. At least it kept off the fiends of memory.

Tom, anxious to keep Elsley's mind employed on some subject which should not be painful, began chatting about the war and its prospects. Elsley soon caught the cue, and talked with wild energy and pathos, opium-fed, of the coming struggle between

despotism and liberty, the arising of Poland and Hungary, and all the grand dreams which then haunted minds like his.

"By Jove!" said Tom, "you are yourself again now. Why don't you put all that into a book?"

"I may perhaps," said Elsley proudly.

"And if it comes to that, why not come to the war, and see it for yourself? A new country—one of the finest in the world. New scenery, new actors,—Why, Constantinople itself is a poem! Yes, there is another 'Revolt of Islam' to be written yet. Why don't you become our war poet? Come and see the fighting; for there'll be plenty of it, let them say what they will. The old bear is not going to drop his dead donkey without a snap and a hug. Come along, and tell people what it's all really like. There will be a dozen Cockneys writing battle songs, I'll warrant, who never saw a man shot in their lives, not even a hare. Come and give us the real genuine grit of it,—for if you can't, who can?"

"It is a grand thought! The true war poets, after all, have been warriors themselves. Körner and Alcæus fought as well as sang, and sang because they fought. Old Homer, too,—who can believe that he had not hewn his way through the very battles which he describes, and seen every wound, every shape of agony? A noble thought, to go out with that army against the northern Anarch, singing in the van of battle, as Taillefer sang the song of Roland before William's knights, and to die like him, the proto-martyr of the Crusade, with the melody yet upon one's lips!"

And his face blazed up with excitement.

"What a handsome fellow he is, after all, if there were but more of him!" said Tom to himself. "I wonder if he'd fight, though, when the singing-fever was off him."

He took Elsley up-stairs into his bed-room, got him washed and shaved; and sent out the woman of the house for mutton chops and stout, and began himself setting out the luncheon table, while Elsley in the room within chanted to himself snatches of poetry.

"The notion has taken; he's composing a war song already, I believe."

It actually was so: but Elsley's brain was weak and wandering; and he was soon silent; and motionless so long, that Tom opened the door and looked in anxiously.

He was sitting on a chair, his hands fallen on his lap, the tears running down his face.

"Well?" asked Tom smilingly, not noticing the tears; "how goes on the opera? I heard through the door the orchestra tuning for the prelude."

Elsley looked up in his face with a puzzled piteous expression.

"Do you know, Thurnall, I fancy at moments that my mind is not what it was. Fancies flit from me as quickly as they come. I had twenty verses five minutes ago, and now I cannot recollect one."

"No wonder," thought Tom to himself. "My dear fellow, recollect all that you have suffered with this neuralgia. Believe me, all you want is animal strength. Chops and porter will bring all the verses back, or better ones instead of them."

He tried to make Elsley eat; and Elsley tried himself: but failed. The moment the meat touched his lips he loathed it, and only courtesy prevented his leaving the room to escape the smell. The laudanum had done its work upon his digestion. He tried the porter, and drank a little: then, suddenly stopping, he pulled out a phial, dropped a heavy dose of his poison into the porter, and tossed it off.

"Sold, am I?" said Tom to himself. "He must have hidden the bottle as he came out of the room with me. Oh, the cunning of those opium-eaters! However, it will keep him quiet just now, and to Eaton Square I must go."

"You had better be quiet now, my dear fellow, after your dose; talking will only excite you. Settle yourself on my bed, and I'll be back in an hour."

So he put Elsley on his bed, carefully removing razors and pistols (for he had still his fears of an outburst of passion), then locked him in, ran down into the Strand, threw himself into a cab for Eaton Square, and asked for Valencia.

Campbell had been there already; so Tom took care to tell nothing which he had not told, expecting, and rightly, that he would not mention Elsley's having fired at him. Lucia was still all but senseless, too weak even to ask for Elsley; to attempt any meeting between her and her husband would be madness.

"What will you do with the unhappy man, Mr. Thurnall?"

"Keep him under my eye, day and night, till he is either rational again, or—"

"Do you think that he may?—Oh my poor sister!"

"I think that he may yet end very sadly, madam. There is no use concealing the truth from you. All I can promise is, that I will treat him as my own brother."

Valencia held out her fair hand to the young doctor. He stooped, and lifted the tips of her fingers to his lips.

"I am not worthy of such an honour, madam. I shall study to deserve it." And he bowed himself out, the same sturdy, self-confident Tom, doing right, he hardly knew why, save that it was all in the way of business.

And now arose the puzzle, what to do with Elsley? He had

set his heart on going down to Whitbury the next day. He had been in England nearly six months, and had not yet seen his father; his heart yearned, too, after the old place, and Mark Armsworth, and many an old friend, whom he might never see again. "However, that fellow I must see to, come what will: business first and pleasure afterwards. If I make him all right —if I even get him out of the world decently, I get the Scoutbush interest on my side—though I believe I have it already. Still, it's as well to lay people under as heavy an obligation as possible. I wish Miss Valencia had asked me whether Elsley wanted any money: it's expensive keeping him myself. However, poor thing, she has other matters to think of: and I dare say, never knew the pleasures of an empty purse. Here we are! Three-and-sixpence—eh, Cabman? I suppose you think I was born Saturday night? There's three shillings. Now, don't chaff me, my excellent friend, or you will find you have met your match, and a leetle more!"

And Tom hurried into his rooms, and found Elsley still sleeping.

He set to work, packing and arranging, for with him every moment found its business; and presently heard his patient call faintly from the next room.

"Thurnall!" said he; "I have been a long journey. I have been to Whitbury once more, and followed my father about his garden, and sat upon my mother's knee. And she taught me one text, and no more. Over and over again she said it, as she looked down at me with still sad eyes, the same text which she spoke the day I left her for London. I never saw her again. 'By this, my son, be admonished; of making of books there is no end; and much study is a weariness of the flesh. Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.'

* * * * Yes, I will go down to Whitbury, and be a little child once more. I will take poor lodgings, and crawl out day by day, down the old lanes, along the old river-banks, where I fed my soul with fair and mad dreams, and reconsider it all from the beginning;—and then die. No one need know me; and if they do, they need not be ashamed of me, I trust—ashamed that a poet has risen up among them, to speak words which have been heard across the globe. At least, they need never know my shame—never know that I have broken the heart of an angel, who gave herself to me, body and soul—attempted the life of a man whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose—never know that I have killed my own child!—that a blacker brand than Cain's is on my brow!—Never know—Oh, my God, what care I? Let them know all, as long as I can have done with shams and affec-

tations, dreams, and vain ambitions, and be just my own self once more for one day, and then die!"

And he burst into convulsive weeping.

"No, Tom, do not comfort me! I ought to die, and I shall die. I cannot face her again; let her forget me, and find a husband who will—and be a father to the children whom I neglected! Oh, my darlings, my darlings! If I could but see you once again: but no! you too would ask me where I had been so long. You too would ask me—your innocent faces at least would—why I had killed your little brother!—Let me weep it out, Thurnall; let me face it all! This very misery is a comfort, for it will kill me all the sooner."

"If you really mean to go to Whitbury, my poor dear fellow," said Tom at last, "I will start with you to-morrow morning. For I too must go; I must see my father."

"You will really?" asked Elsley, who began to cling to him like a child.

"I will indeed. Believe me, you are right; you will find friends there, and admirers too. I know one."

"You do?" asked he, looking up.

"Mary Armsworth, the banker's daughter."

"What! That purse-proud, vulgar man?"

"Don't be afraid of him. A truer and more delicate heart don't beat. No one has more cause to say so than I. He will receive you with open arms, and need be told no more than is necessary; while as his friend, you may defy gossip, and do just what you like."

Tom slipped out that afternoon, paid Elsley's pittance of rent at his old lodgings; bought him a few necessary articles, and lent him, without saying anything, a few more. Elsley sat all day as one in a dream, moaning to himself at intervals, and following Tom vacantly with his eyes, as he moved about the room. Excitement, misery, and opium, were fast wearing out body and mind, and Tom put him to bed that evening, as he would have put a child.

Tom walked out into the Strand to smoke in the fresh air, and think, in spite of himself, of that fair saint from whom he was so perversely flying. Gay girls slithered past him, looked round at him, but in vain; those two great sad eyes hung in his fancy, and he could see nothing else. Ah—if she had but given him back his money—why, what a fool he would have made of himself! Better as it was. He was meant to be a vagabond and an adventurer to the last; and perhaps to find at last the luck which had flitted away before him.

He passed one of the theatre doors; there was a group outside, more noisy and more earnest than such groups are wont

to be; and ere he could pass through them, a shout from within rattled the doors with its mighty pulse, and seemed to shake the very walls. Another; and another!—What was it? Fire?

No. It was the news of Alma.

And the group surged to and fro outside, and talked, and questioned, and rejoiced; and smart gents forgot their vulgar pleasures, and looked for a moment as if they too could have fought—had fought—at Alma; and sinful girls forgot their shame, and looked more beautiful than they had done for many a day, as, beneath the flaring gas-light, their faces glowed for a while with noble enthusiasm and woman's sacred pity, while they questioned Tom, taking him for an officer, as to whether he thought there were many killed.

"I am no officer: but I have been in many a battle, and I know the Russians well, and have seen how they fight; and there is many a brave man killed, and many a one more will be."

"Oh, does it hurt them much?" asked one poor thing.

"Not often," quoth Tom.

"Thank God, thank God!" and she turned suddenly away, and with the impulsive nature of her class, burst into violent sobbing and weeping.

Poor thing! perhaps among the men who fought and fell that day was he to whom she owed the curse of her young life; and after him her lonely heart went forth once more, faithful even in the lowest pit.

"You are strange creatures, women, women!" thought Tom: "but I knew that many a year ago. Now then—the game is growing fast and furious, it seems. Oh, that I may find myself soon in the thickest of it!"

So said Tom Thurnall; and so said Major Campbell, too, that night, as he prepared everything to start next morning to Southampton. "The better the day, the better the deed," quoth he. "When a man is travelling to a better world, he need not be afraid of starting on a Sunday."

CHAPTER XXV.

THE BANKER AND HIS DAUGHTER.

Tom and Elsley are safe at Whitbury at last; and Tom, ere he has seen his father, has packed Elsley safe away in lodgings with an old dame whom he can trust. Then he asks his way to his father's new abode; a small old-fashioned house, with low bay windows jutting out upon the narrow pavement.

Tom stops, and looks in the window. His father is sitting close to it, in his arm-chair, his hands upon his knees, his face lifted to the sunlight, with chin slightly outstretched, and his pale eyes feeling for the light. The expression would have been painful, but for its perfect sweetness and resignation. His countenance is not, perhaps, a strong one; but its delicacy, and calm, and the high forehead, and the long white locks, are most venerable. With a blind man's exquisite sense, he feels Tom's shadow fall on him, and starts, and calls him by name; for he has been expecting him, and thinking of nothing else all the morning, and takes for granted that it must be he.

In another moment Tom is at his father's side. What need to describe the sacred joy of those first few minutes, even if it were possible? But unrestrained tenderness between man and man, rare as it is, and, as it were, unaccustomed to itself, has no passionate fluency, no metaphor or poetry, such as man pours out to woman, and woman again to man. All its language lies in the tones, the looks, the little half-concealed gestures, hints which pass themselves off modestly in jest; and such was Tom's first interview with his father; till the old Isaac, having felt Tom's head and hands again and again, to be sure whether it were his very son or no, made him sit down by him, holding him still fast, and began—

"Now, tell me, tell me, while Jane gets you something to eat. No, Jane, you musn't talk to Master Tom yet, to bother about how much he's grown;—nonsense, I must have him all to myself, Jane. Go and get him some dinner. Now, Tom," as if he was afraid of losing a moment; "you have been a dear boy to write to me every week; but there are so many questions which only word of mouth will answer, and I have stored up dozens of them! I want to know what a coral reef really looks like, and if you saw any trepangs upon them? And what sort of strata is the gold really in? And you saw one of those giant rays; I want a whole hour's talk about the fellow. And—What an old babbler I am! talking to you when you should be talking to me. Now begin. Let us have the trepangs first. Are they real Holothurians or not?"

And Tom began, and told for a full half-hour, interrupted then by some little comment of the old man's, which proved how prodigious was the memory within, imprisoned and forced to feed upon itself.

"You seem to know more about Australia than I do, father," said Tom at last.

"No, child; but Mary Armsworth, God bless her! comes down here almost every evening to read your letters to me; and she has been reading to me a book of Mrs. Lee's Adventures in Aus-

tralia, which reads like a novel; delicious book—to me at least. Why, there is her step outside, I do believe, and her father's with her!"

The lighter woman's step was inaudible to Tom; but the heavy, deliberate waddle of the banker was not. He opened the house-door, and then the parlour-door, without knocking; but when he saw the visitor, he stopped on the threshold with outstretched arms.

"Hillo, ho! who have we here? Our prodigal son returned, with his pockets full of nuggets from the diggings. Oh, mum's the word, is it?" as Tom laid his finger on his lips. "Come here, then, and let's have a look at you!" And he catches both Tom's hands in his, and almost shakes them off. "I knew you were coming, old boy! Mary told me—she's in all the old man's secrets. Come along, Mary, and see your old playfellow. She has got a little fruit for the old gentleman. Mary, where are you? always colloguing with Jane."

Mary comes in: a little dumpty body, with a yellow face, and a red nose, the smile of an angel, and a heart full of many little secrets of other people's—and of one great one of her own, which is no business of any man's—and with fifty thousand pounds as her portion, for she is an only child. But no man will touch that fifty thousand; for "no one would marry me for myself," says Mary; "and no one shall marry me for my money."

So she greets Tom shyly and humbly, without looking in his face, yet very cordially; and then slips away to deposit on the table a noble pine-apple.

"A little bit of fruit from her greenhouse," says the old man in a disparaging tone: "and, oh Jane, bring me a saucer. Here's a sprat I just capered out of Hemmelford mill-pit; perhaps the Doctor would like it fried for supper, if it's big enough not to fall through the gridiron."

Jane, who knows Mark Armsworth's humour, brings in the largest dish in the house, and Mark pulls out of his basket a great three-pound trout.

"Aha! my young rover; Old Mark's right hand hasn't forgot its cunning, eh? And this is the month for them; fish all quiet now. When fools go a-shooting, wise men go a-fishing! Eh? Come here, and look me over. How do I wear, eh? As like a Muscovy duck as ever, you young rogue? Do you recollect asking me, at the Club dinner, why I was like a Muscovy duck? Because I was a fat thing in green velveteen, with a bald red head, that was always waddling about the river bank. Ah, those were days! We'll have some more of them. Come up to-night and try the old '21 bin."

"I must have him myself to-night; indeed I must, Mark," says the Doctor.

"All to yourself, you selfish old rogue?"

"Why—no—"

"We'll come down, then, Mary and I, and bring the '21 with us, and hear all his cock-and-bull stories. Full of travellers' lies as ever, eh? Well, I'll come, and smoke my pipe with you. Always the same old Mark, my lad," nudging Tom with his elbow; "one fellow comes and borrows my money, and goes out and calls me a stingy old hunks because I won't let him cheat me; another comes, and eats my pines, and drinks my port, goes home, and calls me a purse-proud upstart, because he can't match 'em. Never mind; old Mark's old Mark; sound in the heart, and sound in the liver, just the same as thirty years ago, and will be till he takes his last quietus est—

'And drops into his grassy nest.'

Bye, bye, Doctor! Come, Mary!"

And out he toddled, with silent little Mary at his heels.

"Old Mark wears well, body and soul," said Tom.

"He is a noble, generous fellow, and as delicate-hearted as a woman withal, in spite of his conceit and roughness. Fifty and odd years now, Tom, have we been brothers, and I never found him change. And brothers we shall be, I trust, a few years more, till I see you back again from the East, comfortably settled. And then—"

"Don't talk of that, Sir, please!" said Tom, quite quickly and sharply. "How ill poor Mary looks!"

"So they say, poor child; and one hears it in her voice. Ah, Tom, that girl is an angel; she has been to me daughter, doctor, clergyman, eyes and library; and would have been nurse too, if it had not been for making old Jane jealous. But she is ill. Some love affair, I suppose—"

"How quaint it is, that the father has kept all the animal vigour to himself, and transmitted none to the daughter."

"He has not kept the soul to himself, Tom, or the eyes either. She will bring me in wild flowers, and talk to me about them, till I fancy I can see them as well as ever. Ah, well! It is a sweet world still, Tom, and there are sweet souls in it. A sweet world: I was too fond of looking at it once, I suppose, so God took away my sight, that I might learn to look at Him." And the old man lay back in his chair, and covered his face with his handkerchief, and was quite still awhile. And Tom watched him, and thought that he would give all his cunning and power to be like that old man.

Then Jane came in, and laid the cloth,—a coarse one enough,

—and Tom picked a cold mutton bone with a steel fork, and drank his pint of beer from the public-house, and lighted his father's pipe, and then his own, and vowed that he had never dined so well in his life, and began his traveller's stories again.

And in the evening Mark came in, with a bottle of the '21 in his coat-tail pocket; and the three sat and chatted, while Mary brought out her work, and stitched listening silently, till it was time to lead the old man up-stairs.

Tom put his father to bed, and then made a hesitating request—

"There is a poor sick man whom I brought down with me, Sir, if you could spare me half-an-hour. It really is a professional case; he is under my charge, I may say."

"What is it, boy?"

"Well, laudanum and a broken heart."

"Exercise and ammonia for the first. For the second, God's grace and the grave; and those latter medicines you can't exhibit, my dear boy. Well, as it is professional duty, I suppose you must: but don't exceed the hour; I shall lie awake till you return, and then you must talk me to sleep."

So Tom went out and homeward with Mark and Mary, for their roads lay together; and as he went, he thought good to tell them somewhat of the history of John Briggs, alias Elsley Vavasour.

"Poor fool!" said Mark, who listened in silence to the end. "Why didn't he mind his bottles, and just do what Heaven sent him to do? Is he in want of the rhino, Tom?"

"He had not five shillings left after he had paid his fare; and he refuses to ask his wife for a farthing."

"Quite right—very proper spirit." And Mark walked on in silence a few minutes.

"I say, Tom, a fool and his money are soon parted. There's a five-pound note for him, you begging, insinuating dog, and be hanged to you both! I shall die in the workhouse at this rate."

"Oh, father, you will never miss—"

"Who told you I thought I should, pray? Don't you go giving another five pounds out of your pocket-money behind my back, ma'am. I know your tricks of old. Tom, I'll come and see the poor beggar to-morrow with you, and call him Mr. Vavasour—Lord Vavasour, if he likes—if you'll warrant me against laughing in his face." And the old man did laugh, till he stopped and held his sides again.

"Oh, father, father, don't be so cruel. Remember how wretched the poor man is."

"I can't think of anything but old Bolus's boy turned poet. Why did you tell me, Tom, you bad fellow? It's too much for a man at my time of life, and after his dinner too."

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And with that he opened the little gate by the side of the grand one, and turned to ask Tom—

"Won't come in, boy, and have one more cigar?"

"I promised my father to be back as quickly as possible."

"Good lad—that's the plan to go on—

> 'You'll be churchwarden before all's over,
> And so arrive at wealth and fame.'

Instead of writing po-o-o-etry! Do you recollect that morning, and the black draught? Oh dear, my side!"

And Tom heard him keckling to himself up the garden walk to his house; went off to see that Elsley was safe; and then home, and slept like a top; no wonder, for he would have done so the night before his execution.

And what was little Mary doing all the while?

She had gone up to the room, after telling her father, with a kiss, not to forget to say his prayers. And then she fed her canary bird, and made up the Persian cat's bed; and then sat long at the open window, gazing out over the shadow-dappled lawn, away to the poplars sleeping in the moonlight, and the shining silent stream, and the shining silent stars, till she seemed to become as one of them, and a quiet heaven within her eyes took counsel with the quiet heaven above. And then she drew in suddenly, as if stung by some random thought, and shut the window. A picture hung over her mantel-piece—a portrait of her mother, who had been a country beauty in her time. She glanced at it, and then at the looking-glass. Would she have given her fifty thousand pounds to have exchanged her face for such a face as that?

She caught up her little Thomas à Kempis, marked through and through with lines and references, and sat and read steadfastly for an hour and more. That was her school, as it has been the school of many a noble soul. And, for some cause or other, that stinging thought returned no more; and she knelt and prayed like a little child; and like a little child slept sweetly all the night, and was away before breakfast the next morning, after feeding the canary and the cat, to old women who worshipped her as their ministering angel, and said, looking after her: "That dear Miss Mary, pity she is so plain! Such a match as she might have made! But she'll be handsome enough when she is a blessed angel in heaven."

Ah, true sisters of mercy, whom the world sneers at as "old maids," if you pour out on cats and dogs and parrots, a little of the love which is yearning to spend itself on children of your own flesh and blood! As long as such as you walk this lower world, one needs no Butler's Analogy to prove to us that there

is another world, where such as you will have a fuller and a fairer (I dare not say a-juster) portion.

* * * * * *

Next morning Mark started with Tom to call on Elsley, chatting and puffing all the way.

"I'll butter him, trust me. Nothing comforts a poor beggar like a bit of praise when he's down; and all fellows that take to writing are as greedy after it as trout after the drake, even if they only scribble in county newspapers. I've watched them when I've been electioneering, my boy!"

"Only," said Tom, "don't be angry with him if he is proud and peevish. The poor fellow is all but mad with misery."

"Poh! quarrel with him? whom did I ever quarrel with? If he barks, I'll stop his mouth with a good dinner. I suppose he's gentleman enough to invite?"

"As much a gentleman as you and I; not of the very first water, of course. Still he eats like other people, and don't break many glasses during a sitting. Think! he couldn't have been a very great cad to marry a nobleman's daughter!"

"Why, no. Speaks well for him, that, considering his breeding. He must be a very clever fellow to have caught the trick of the thing so soon."

"And so he is, a very clever fellow; too clever by half; and a very fine-hearted fellow, too, in spite of his conceit and his temper. But that don't prevent his being an awful fool!"

"You speak like a book, Tom!" said old Mark, clapping him on the back. "Look at me! no one can say I was ever troubled with genius: but I can show my money, pay my way, eat my dinner, kill my trout, hunt my hounds, help a lame dog over a stile" (which was Mark's phrase for doing a generous thing), "and thank God for all; and who wants more, I should like to know? But here we are—you go up first!"

They found Elsley crouched up over the empty grate, his head in his hands, and a few scraps of paper by him, on which he had been trying to scribble. He did not look up as they came in, but gave a sort of impatient half-turn, as if angry at being disturbed. Tom was about to announce the banker; but he announced himself.

"Come to do myself the honour of calling on you, Mr. Vavasour. I am sorry to see you so poorly; I hope our Whitbury air will set all right."

"You mistake me, Sir; my name is Briggs!" said Elsley, without turning his head; but a moment after he looked up angrily.

"Mr. Armsworth? I beg your pardon, Sir; but what brings

you here? Are you come, Sir, to use the rich successful man's right, and lecture me in my misery?"

"'Pon my word, Sir, you must have forgotten old Mark Armsworth, indeed, if you fancy him capable of any such dirt. No, Sir, I came to pay my respects to you, Sir, hoping that you'd come up and take a family dinner. I could do no less," ran on the banker, seeing that Elsley was preparing a peevish answer, "considering the honour that, I hear, you have been to your native town. A very distinguished person, our friend Tom tells me; and we ought to be proud of you, and behave to you as you deserve, for I am sure we don't send too many clever fellows out of Whitbury."

"Would that you had never sent me!" said Elsley in his bitter way.

"Ah, Sir, that's matter of opinion! You would never have been heard of down here, never have had justice done you, I mean; for heard of you have been. There's my daughter has read your poems again and again—always quoting them; and very pretty they sound too. Poetry is not in my line, of course; still, it's a credit to a man to do anything well, if he has the gift; and she tells me that you have it, and plenty of it. And though she's no fine lady, thank Heaven, I'll back her for good sense against any woman. Come up, Sir, and judge for yourself if I don't speak the truth; she will be delighted to meet you, and bade me say so."

By this time good Mark had talked himself out of breath; and Elsley flushing up, as of old, at a little praise, began to stammer an excuse. "His nerves were so weak, and his spirits so broken with late troubles."

"My dear Sir, that's the very reason I want you to come. A bottle of port will cure the nerves, and a pleasant chat the spirits. Nothing like forgetting all for a little time; and then to it again with a fresh lease of strength, and beat it at last like a man."

"Too late, my dear Sir; I must pay the penalty of my own folly," said Elsley, really won by the man's cordiality.

"Never too late, Sir, while there's life left in us. And," he went on in a gentler tone, "if we all were to pay for our own follies, or lie down and die when we saw them coming full cry at our heels, where would any one of us be by now? I have been a fool in my time, young gentleman, more than once or twice; and that too when I was old enough to be your father; and down I went, and deserved what I got: but my rule always was—Fight fair; fall soft; know when you've got enough; and don't cry out when you've got it: but just go home; train again; and say—better luck next fight." And so old Mark's sermon

ended (as most of them did) in somewhat Socratic allegory, savouring rather of the market than of the study; but Elsley understood him, and looked up with a smile.

"You too are somewhat of a poet in your way, I see, Sir!"

"I never thought to live to hear that, Sir. I can't doubt now that you are cleverer than your neighbours, for you have found out something which they never did. But you will come?—for that's my business."

Elsley looked inquiringly at Tom; he had learnt now to consult his eye, and lean on him like a child. Tom looked a stout yes, and Elsley said languidly,—

"You have given me so much new and good advice in a few minutes, Sir, that I must really do myself the pleasure of coming and hearing more."

"Well done, our side!" cried old Mark. "Dinner at half-past five. No London late hours here, Sir. Miss Armsworth will be out of her mind when she hears you're coming."

And off he went.

"Do you think he'll come up to the scratch, Tom?"

"I am very much afraid his courage will fail him. I will see him again, and bring him up with me: but now, my dear Mr. Armsworth, do remember one thing; that if you go on with him at your usual rate of hospitality, the man will as surely be drunk, as his nerves and brain are all but ruined; and if he is so, he will most probably destroy himself to-morrow morning."

"Destroy himself?"

"He will. The shame of making a fool of himself just now before you will be more than he could bear. So be stingy for once. He will not wish for it unless you press him; but if he talks (and he will talk after the first half-hour), he will forget himself, and half a bottle will make him mad; and then I won't answer for the consequences."

"Good gracious! why, these poets want as tender handling as a bag of gunpowder over the fire."

"You speak like a book there in your turn." And Tom went home to his father.

He returned in due time. A new difficulty had arisen. Elsley under the excitement of expectation, had gone out and deigned to buy laudanum—so will an unhealthy craving degrade a man!—of old Bolus himself, who luckily did not recognise him. He had taken his fullest dose, and was now unable to go anywhere or do anything. Tom did not disturb him: but went away, sorely perplexed, and very much minded to tell a white lie to Armsworth, in whose eyes this would be an offence—not unpardonable, for nothing with him was unpardonable, save lying or cruelty—but very grievous. If a man had drunk too much

wine in his house, he would have simply kept his eye on him afterwards, as a fool who did not know when he had his "quotum;" but laudanum drinking,—involving, too, the breaking of an engagement, which, well managed, might have been of immense use to Elsley,—was a very different matter. So Tom knew not what to say or do; and not knowing, determined to wait on Providence, smartened himself as best he could, went up to the great house, and found Miss Mary.

"I'll tell her. She will manage it somehow, if she is a woman; much more if she is an angel, as my father says."

Mary looked very much shocked and grieved; answered hardly a word; but said at last, "Come in, while I go and see my father." He came into the smart drawing-room, which he could see was seldom used; for Mary lived in her own room, her father in his counting-house, or in his "den." In ten minutes she came down. Tom thought she had been crying.

"I have settled it. Poor unhappy man! We will talk of something more pleasant. Tell me about your shipwreck, and that place,—Aberalva, is it not? What a pretty name!"

Tom told her, wondering then, and wondering long afterwards, how she had "settled it" with her father. She chatted on artlessly enough, till the old man came in, and to dinner, in capital humour, without saying one word of Elsley.

"How has the old lion been tamed?" thought Tom. "The two greatest affronts you could offer him in old times were, to break an engagement, and to despise his good cheer." He did not know what the quiet oil on the waters of such a spirit as Mary's can effect.

The evening passed pleasantly enough till nine, in chatting over old times, and listening to the history of every extraordinary trout and fox which had been killed within twenty miles, when the footboy entered with a somewhat scared face.

"Please, Sir, is Mr. Vavasour here?"

"Here? Who wants him?"

"Mrs. Brown, Sir, in Hemmelford Street. Says he lodges with her, and has been to see for him at Dr. Thurnall's."

"I think you had better go, Mr. Thurnall," said Mary, quietly.

"Indeed you had, boy. Bother poets, and the day they first began to breed in Whitbury! Such an evening spoilt! Have a cup of coffee? No? then a glass of sherry?"

Out went Tom. Mrs. Brown had been up, and seen him seemingly sleeping; then had heard him run downstairs hurriedly. He passed her in the passage, looking very wild. "Seemed, Sir, just like my nevy's wife's brother, Will Ford, before he made away with hes'self."

Tom goes off post haste, revolving many things in a crafty

heart. Then he steers for Bolus's shop. Bolus is at "The Angler's Arms;" but his assistant is in.

"Did a gentleman call here just now, in a long cloak, with a felt wide-awake?"

"Yes." And the assistant looks confused enough for Tom to rejoin,—

"And you sold him laudanum?"

"Why—ah—"

"And you had sold him laudanum already this afternoon, you young rascal! How dare you, twice in six hours? I'll hold you responsible for the man's life!"

"You dare call me a rascal?" blusters the youth, terror-stricken at finding how much Tom knows.

"I am a member of the College of Surgeons," says Tom, recovering his coolness, "and have just been dining with Mr. Armsworth. I suppose you know him?"

The assistant shook in his shoes at the name of that terrible justice of the peace and of the war also; and meekly and contritely he replied,—

"Oh Sir, what shall I do?"

"You're in a very neat scrape; you could not have feathered your nest better," says Tom, quietly filling his pipe, and thinking. "As you behave now, I will get you out of it, or leave you to—you know what, as well as I. Get your hat."

He went out, and the youth followed trembling, while Tom formed his plans in his mind.

"The wild beast goes home to his lair to die, and so may he; for I fear it's life and death now. I'll try the house where he was born. Somewhere in Water Lane it is, I know."

And toward Water Lane he hurried. It was a low-lying offshoot of the town, leading along the water meadows, with a straggling row of houses on each side, the perennial haunts of fever and ague. Before them, on each side the road, and fringed with pollard willows and tall poplars, ran a tiny branch of the Whit, to feed some mill below; and spread out, meanwhile, into ponds and mires full of offal and duckweed and rank floating grass. A thick mist hung knee-deep over them, and over the gardens right and left; and as Tom came down on the lane from the main street above, he could see the mist spreading across the water-meadows and reflecting the moon-beams like a lake; and as he walked into it, he felt as if he were walking down a well. And he hurried down the lane, looking out anxiously ahead for the long cloak.

At last he came to a better sort of house. That might be it. He would take the chance. There was a man of the middle class, and two or three women, standing at the gate. He went up—

"Pray, Sir, did a medical man named Briggs ever live here?"

What do you want to know for?"

"Why"—Tom thought matters were too serious for delicacy—"I am looking for a gentleman, and thought he might have come here."

"And so he did, if you mean one in a queer hat and a cloak."

"How long since?"

"Why, he came up our garden an hour or more ago; walked right into the parlour without with your leave, or by your leave, and stared at us all round like one out of his mind; and so away, as soon as ever I asked him what he was at—"

"Which way?"

"To the river, I expect: I ran out, and saw him go down the lane, but I was not going far by night alone with any such strange customers."

"Lend me a lanthorn then, for Heaven's sake!"

The lanthorn is lent, and Tom starts again down the lane.

Now to search. At the end of the lane is a cross road parallel to the river. A broad still ditch lies beyond it, with a little bridge across, where one gets minnows for bait; then a broad water-meadow; then silver Whit.

The bridge-gate is open. Tom hurries across the road to it. The lanthorn shows him fresh footmarks going into the meadow. Forward!

Up and down in that meadow for an hour or more did Tom and the trembling youth beat like a brace of pointer dogs, stumbling into gripes, and over sleeping cows; and more than once stopping short just in time, as they were walking into some broad and deep feeder.

Almost in despair, and after having searched down the river bank for full two hundred yards, Tom was on the point of returning, when his eye rested on a part of the stream where the mist lay higher than usual, and let the reflection of the moonlight off the water reach his eye; and in the moonlight ripples, close to the farther bank of the river—what was that black lump?

Tom knew the spot well; the river there is very broad, and very shallow, flowing round low islands of gravel and turf. It was very low just now too, as it generally is in October; there could not be four inches of water where the black lump lay, but on the side neare st him the water was full knee deep.

The thing, whatever it was, was forty yards from him; and it was a cold night for wading. It might be a hassock of rushes; a tuft of the great water-dock; a dead dog; one of the "hangs" with which the club-water was studded, torn up and stranded: but yet, to Tom, it had not a canny look.

"As usual! Here am I getting wet, dirty, and miserable,

about matters which are not the slightest concern of mine! I believe I shall end by getting hanged or shot in somebody else's place, with this confounded spirit of meddling. Yah! how cold the water is!"

For in he went, the grumbling honest dog; stepped across to the black lump; and lifted it up hastily enough,—for it was Elsley Vavasour.

Drowned?

No. But wet through, and senseless from mingled cold and laudanum.

Whether he had meant to drown himself, and lighting on the shallow, had stumbled on till he fell exhausted: or whether he had merely blundered into the stream, careless whither he went, Tom knew not, and never knew; for Elsley himself could not recollect.

Tom took him in his arms, carried him ashore and up through the water-meadow; borrowed a blanket and a wheelbarrow at the nearest cottage; wrapped him up; and made the offending surgeon's assistant wheel him to his lodgings.

He sat with him there an hour; and then entered Mark's house again with his usual composed face, to find Mark and Mary sitting up in great anxiety.

"Mr. Armsworth, does the telegraph work at this time of night?"

"I'll make it, if it is wanted. But what's the matter?"

"You will indeed?"

"'Gad, I'll go myself and kick up the station-master. What's the matter?"

"That if poor Mrs. Vavasour wishes to see her husband alive, she must be here in four-and-twenty hours. I'll tell you all presently—"

"Mary, my coat and comforter!" cries Mark, jumping up.

"And, Mary, a pen and ink to write the message," says Tom.

"Oh! cannot I be of any use?" says Mary.

"No, you angel."

"You must not call me an angel, Mr. Thurnall. After all, what can I do which you have not done already?"

Tom started. Grace had once used to him the very same words. By the bye, what was it in the two women which made them so like? Certainly, neither face nor fortune. Something in the tones of their voices.

"Ah! if Grace had Mary's fortune, or Mary Grace's face!" thought Tom, as he hurried back to Elsley, and Mark rushed down to the station.

Elsley was conscious when he returned, and only too conscious. All night he screamed in agonies of rheumatic fever; by the

next afternoon he was failing fast; his heart was affected; and Tom knew that he might die any hour.

The evening train brings two ladies, Valencia and Lucia. At the risk of her life, the poor faithful wife has come.

A gentleman's carriage is waiting for them, though they have ordered none; and as they go through the station-room, a plain little well-dressed body comes humbly up to them—

"Are either of these ladies Mrs. Vavasour?"

"Yes! I!—I!—is he alive?" gasps Lucia.

"Alive, and better! and expecting you—"

"Better?—expecting me?" almost shrieks she, as Valencia and Mary (for it is she) help her to the carriage. Mary puts them in, and turns away.

"Are you not coming too?" asks Valencia, who is puzzled.

"No, thank you, Madam; I am going to take a walk. John, you know where to drive these ladies."

Little Mary does not think it necessary to say that she, with her father's carriage, has been down to two other afternoon trains, upon the chance of finding them.

But why is not Frank Headley with them, when he is needed most? And why are Valencia's eyes more red with weeping than even her sister's sorrow need have made them?

Because Frank Headley is rolling away in a French railway, on his road to Marseilles, and to what Heaven shall find for him to do.

Yes, he is gone Eastward Ho among the many; will he come Westward Ho again, among the few?

They are at the door of Elsley's lodgings now. Tom Thurnall meets them there, and bows them upstairs silently. Lucia is so weak that she has to cling to the banister a moment; and then, with a strong shudder, the spirit conquers the flesh, and she hurries up before them both.

It is a small low room—Valencia had expected that: but she had expected, too, confusion and wretchedness: for a note from Major Campbell, ere he started, had told her of the condition in which Elsley had been found. Instead, she finds neatness—even gaiety; fresh damask linen, comfortable furniture, a vase of hothouse flowers, while the air is full of cool perfumes. No one is likely to tell her that Mary has furnished all at Tom's hint—"We must smarten up the place, for the poor wife's sake. It will take something off the shock; and I want to avoid shocks for her."

So Tom had worked with his own hands that morning; arranging the room as carefully as any woman, with that true doctor's forethought and consideration, which often issues in the loftiest, because the most unconscious, benevolence.

He paused at the door—

"Will you go in?" whispered he to Valencia, in a tone which meant—"you had better not."

"Not yet—I dare say he is too weak."

Lucia darted in, and Tom shut the door behind her, and waited at the stair-head. "Better," thought he, "to let the two poor creatures settle their own concerns. It must end soon, in any case."

Lucia rushed to the bed-side, drew back the curtains—

"Tom!" moaned Elsley.

"Not Tom!—Lucia!"

"Lucia?—Lucia St. Just!" answered he, in a low abstracted voice, as if trying to recollect.

"Lucia Vavasour!—your Lucia!"

Elsley slowly raised himself upon his elbow, and looked into her face with a sad inquiring gaze.

"Elsley—darling Elsley!—don't you know me?"

"Yes, very well indeed; better than you know me. I am not Vavasour at all. My name is Briggs—John Briggs, the apothecary's son, come home to Whitbury to die."

She did not hear, or did not care for those last words.

"Elsley! I am your wife!—your own wife!—who never loved any one but you—never, never, never!"

"Yes, my wife, at least!—Curse them, that they cannot deny!" said he, in the same abstracted voice.

"Oh God! is he mad?" thought she. "Elsley, speak to me!—I am your Lucia—your love—"

And she tore off her bonnet, and threw herself beside him on the bed, and clasped him in her arms, murmuring,—"Your wife! who never loved any one but you!"

Slowly his frozen heart and frozen brain melted beneath the warmth of her great love: but he did not speak: only he passed his weak arm round her neck; and she felt that his cheek was wet with tears, while she murmured on, like a cooing dove, the same sweet words again—

"Call me your love once more, and I shall know that all is past."

"Then call me no more Elsley, love!" whispered he. "Call me John Briggs, and let us have done with shams for ever."

"No; you are my Elsley—my Vavasour! and I am your wife once more!" and the poor thing fondled his head as it lay upon the pillow. "My own Elsley, to whom I gave myself, body and soul; for whom I would die now,—oh, such a death!—any death!"

"How could I doubt you?—fool that I was!"

"No, it was all my fault. It was all my odious temper! But we will be happy now, will we not?"

Elsley smiled sadly, and began babbling—Yes, they would take a farm, and he would plough, and sow, and be of some use before he died; "But promise me one thing!" cried he, with sudden strength.

"What?"

"That you will go home and burn all the poetry—all the manuscripts, and never let the children write a verse—a verse—when I am dead?" And his head sank back, and his jaw dropped.

"He is dead!" cried the poor impulsive creature, with a shriek which brought in Tom and Valencia.

"He is not dead, Madam: but you must be very gentle with him, if we are to—"

Tom saw that there was little hope.

"I will do anything,—only save him!—save him! Mr. Thurnall, till I have atoned for all."

"You have little enough to atone for, Madam," said Tom, as he busied himself about the sufferer. He saw that all would soon be over, and would have had Mrs. Vavasour withdraw: but she was so really good a nurse as long as she could control herself, that he could hardly spare her.

So they sat together by the sick bed-side, as the short hours passed into the long, and the long hours into the short again, and the October dawn began to shine through the shutterless window.

A weary eventless night it was, a night as of many years, as worse and worse grew the weak frame; and Tom looked alternately at the heaving chest, and shortening breath, and rattling throat, and then at the pale still face of the lady.

"Better she should sit by (thought he), and watch him till she is tired out. It will come on her the more gently, after all. He will die at sunrise, as so many die."

At last he began gently feeling for Elsley's pulse. Her eye caught his movement, and she half sprang up; but at a gesture from him she sank quietly on her knees, holding her husband's hand in her own.

Elsley turned toward her once, ere the film of death had fallen, and looked her full in the face, with his beautiful eyes full of love. Then the eyes paled and faded; but still they sought for her painfully long after she had buried her head in the coverlet, unable to bear the sight.

And so vanished away Elsley Vavasour, poet and genius, into his own place.

"Let us pray," said a deep voice from behind the curtain:

it was Mark Armsworth's. He had come over with the first dawn, to bring the ladies food; had slipped upstairs to ask what news, found the door open, and entered in time to see the last gasp.

Lucia kept her head still buried: and Tom, for the first time for many a year, knelt, as the old banker commended to God the soul of our dear brother just departing this life. Then Mark glided quietly down-stairs, and Valencia, rising, tried to lead Mrs. Vavasour away.

But then broke out in all its wild passion the Irish temperament. Let us pass it over; why try to earn a little credit by depicting the agony and the weakness of a sister?

At last Thurnall got her down-stairs. Mark was there still, having sent off for his carriage. He quietly put her arm through his, led her off, worn out and unresisting, drove her home, delivered her and Valencia into Mary's keeping, and then asked Tom to stay and sit with him.

"I hope I've no very bad conscience, boy; but Mary's busy with the poor young thing, mere child she is, too, to go through such a night; and, somehow, I don't like to be left alone, after such a sigh as that!"

* * * * * *

"Tom!" said Mark, as they sat smoking in silence, after breakfast, in the study. "Tom!"

"Yes, Sir!"

"That was an awful death-bed, Tom!"

Tom was silent.

"I don't mean that he died hard, as we say; but so young, Tom. And I suppose poets' souls are worth something, like other people's—perhaps more. I can't understand 'em: but my Mary seems to, and people, like her, who think a poet the finest thing in the world. I laugh at it all when I am jolly, and call it sentiment and cant: but I believe that they are nearer heaven than I am: though I think they don't quite know where heaven is, nor where" (with a wicked wink, in spite of the sadness of his tone)—"where they themselves are either."

"I'll tell you, Sir. I have seen men enough die—we doctors are hardened to it: but I have seen unprofessional deaths—men we didn't kill ourselves; I have seen men drowned, shot, hanged, run over, and worse deaths than that, Sir, too;—and, somehow, I never felt any death like that man's. Granted, he began by trying to set the world right, when he hadn't yet set himself right; but wasn't it some credit to see that the world was wrong?"

"I don't know that. The world's a very good world."

"To you and me; but there are men who have higher notions

than I of what this world ought to be; and, for aught I know, they are right. That Aberalva Curate, Headley, had; and so had Briggs, in his own way. I thought him once only a poor discontented devil, who quarrelled with his bread and butter because he hadn't teeth to eat it with: but there was more in the fellow, coxcomb as he was. 'Tisn't often that I let that croaking old bogy, Madam might have been, trouble me; but I cannot help thinking that if, fifteen years ago, I had listened to his vapourings more, and bullied him about them less, he might have been here still."

"You wouldn't have been then. Well for you that you didn't catch his fever."

"And write verses too? Don't make me laugh, Sir, on such a day as this; I always comfort myself with—'it's no business of mine:' but, somehow, I can't do so just now." And Tom sat silent, more softened than he had been for years.

"Let's talk of something else," said Mark at last. "You had the cholera very bad down there, I hear?"

"Oh, sharp, but short," said Tom, who disliked any subject which brought Grace to his mind.

"Any on my lord's estate with the queer name?"

"Not a case. We stopped the devil out there, thanks to his lordship."

"So did we here. We were very near in for it, though, I fancy.—At least, I chose to fancy so—thought it a good opportunity to clean Whitbury once for all."

"It's just like you. Well?"

"Well, I offered the Town-council to drain the whole town at my own expense, if they'd let me have the sewage. And that only made things worse; for as soon as the beggars found out the sewage was worth anything, they were down on me, as if I wanted to do them—I, Mark Armsworth!—and would sooner let half the town rot with an epidemic, than have reason to fancy I'd made any money out of them. So a pretty fight I had, for half-a-dozen meetings, till I called in my lord; and, Sir, he came down by the next express, like a trump, all the way from town, and gave them such a piece of his mind—was going to have the Board of Health down, and turn on the Government tap, commissioners and all, and cost 'em hundreds: till the fellows shook in their shoes;—and so I conquered, and here we are. as clean as a nut,—and a fig for the cholera!—except down in Water-lane, which I don't know what to do with; for if tradesmen will run up houses on spec in a water-meadow, who can stop them? There ought to be a law for it, say I; but I say a good many things in the twelve months that nobody minds. But, my dear boy, if one man in a town has pluck and money, he may do it.

It'll cost him a few : I've had to pay the main part myself, after all : but I suppose God will make it up to a man somehow. That's old Mark's faith, at least. Now I want to talk to you about yourself. My lord comes into town to-day, and you must see him."

"Why, then? He can't help me with the Bashi-bazouks, can he?"

"Bashi-fiddles! I say, Tom, the more I think over it, the more it won't do. It's throwing yourself away. They say that Turkish contingent is getting on terribly ill."

"More need of me to make them well."

"Hang it—I mean—hasn't justice done it, and so on. The papers are full of it."

"Well," quoth Tom, "and why should it?"

"Why, man alive, if England spends all this money on the men, she ought to do her duty by them."

"I don't see that. As Pecksniff says, 'If England expects every man to do his duty, she's very sanguine, and will be much disappointed.' They don't intend to do their duty by her, any more than I do; so why should she do her duty by them?"

"Don't intend to do your duty?"

"I'm going out because England's money is necessary to me; and England hires me because my skill is necessary to her. I didn't think of duty when I settled to go, and why should she? I'll get all out of her I can in the way of pay and practice, and she may get all she can out of me in the way of work. As for being ill-used, I never expect to be anything else in this life. I'm sure I don't care; and I'm sure she don't; so live and let live; talk plain truth, and leave Bunkum for right honourables who keep their places thereby. Give me another weed."

"Queer old philosopher you are; but go you shan't!"

"Go I will, Sir; don't stop me. I've my reasons, and they're good ones enough."

The conversation was interrupted by the servant;—Lord Minchampstead was waiting at Mr. Armsworth's office.

"Early bird, his lordship, and gets the worm accordingly," says Mark, as he hurries off to attend on his ideal hero. "You come over to the shop in half-an-hour, mind."

"But why?"

"Confound you, Sir! you talk of having your reasons: I have mine!"

Mark looked quite cross; so Tom gave way, and went in due time to the bank.

Standing with his back to the fire in Mark's inner room, he saw the old cotton prince.

"And a prince he looks like," quoth Tom to himself, as he waited in the bank outside, and looked through the glass screen.

"How well the old man wears! I wonder how many fresh thousands he has made since I saw him last, seven years ago."

And a very noble person Lord Minchampstead did look; one to whom hats went off almost without their owners' will; tall and portly, with a soldier-like air of dignity and command, which was relieved by the good-nature of the countenance. Yet it was a good-nature which would stand no trifling. The jaw was deep and broad, though finely shaped; the mouth firm set; the nose slightly aquiline; the brow of great depth and height, though narrow;—altogether a Julius Cæsar's type of head; that of a man born to rule self, and therefore to rule all he met.

Tom looked over his dress, not forgetting, like a true Englishman, to mark what sort of boots he wore. They were boots not quite fashionable, but carefully cleaned on trees; trousers strapped tightly over them, which had adopted the military stripe, but retained the slit at the ancle which was in vogue forty years ago; frock coat with a velvet collar, buttoned up, but not too far; high and tight blue cravat below an immense shirt collar; a certain care and richness of dress throughout, but soberly behind the fashion: while the hat was a very shabby and broken one, and the whip still more shabby and broken; all which indicated to Tom that his lordship let his tailor and his valet dress him; and though not unaware that it behoved him to set out his person as it deserved, was far too fine a gentleman to trouble himself about looking fine.

Mark looks round, sees Tom, and calls him in.

"Mr. Thurnall, I am glad to meet you, Sir. You did me good service at Pentremochyn, and did it cheaply. I was agreeably surprised, I confess, at receiving a bill for four pounds seven shillings and sixpence, where I expected one of twenty or thirty."

"I charged according to what my time was really worth there, my lord. I heartily wish it had been worth more."

"No doubt," says my lord, in the blandest, but the driest tone.

Some men would have, under a sense of Tom's merits, sent him a cheque off-hand for five-and-twenty pounds: but that is not Lord Minchampstead's way of doing business. He had paid simply the sum asked: but he had set Tom down in his memory as a man whom he could trust to do good work, and to do it cheaply; and now—

"You are going to join the Turkish contingent?"

"I am."

"You know that part of the world well, I believe?"

"Intimately."

"And the languages spoken there?"

"By no means all. Russian and Tartar well; Turkish toler ably; with a smattering of two or three Circassian dialects."

"Humph! A fair list. Any Persian?"

"Only a few words."

"Humph! If you can learn one language I presume you can learn another. Now, Mr. Thurnall, I have no doubt that you will do your duty in the Turkish contingent."

Tom bowed.

"But I must ask you if your resolution to join it is fixed?"

"I only join it because I can get no other employment at the seat of war."

"Humph! You wish to go then, in any case, to the seat of war?"

"Certainly."

"No doubt you have sufficient reasons. . . . . Armsworth, this puts the question in a new light."

Tom looked round at Mark, and, behold, his face bore a ludicrous mixture of anger and disappointment, and perplexity. He seemed to be trying to make signals to Tom, and to be afraid of doing so openly before the great man.

"He is as wilful and as foolish as a girl, my lord; and I've told him so."

"Everybody knows his own business best, Armsworth; Mr. Thurnall, have you any fancy for the post of Queen's messenger?"

"I should esteem myself only too happy as one."

"They are not to be obtained now as easily as they were fifty years ago; and are given, as you may know, to a far higher class of men than they were formerly. But I shall do my best to obtain you one, when an opportunity offers."

Tom was beginning his profusest thanks: for was not his fortune made? but Lord Minchampstead stopped him with an uplifted finger.

"And, meanwhile, there are foreign employments of which neither those who bestow them, nor those who accept them, are expected to talk much: but for which you, if I am rightly informed, would be especially fitted."

Tom bowed; and his face spoke a hundred assents.

"Very well; if you will come over to Minchampstead to-morrow, I will give you letters to friends of mine in Town. I trust that they may give you a better opportunity than the Bashi-bazouks will, of displaying that courage, address, and self-command, which, I understand, you possess in so uncommon a degree. Good morning!" And forth the great man went.

Most opposite were the actions of the two whom he had left behind him.

Tom dances about the room, hurrahing in a whisper—

"My fortune's made! The secret service! Oh, what bliss! The thing I've always longed for!"

Mark dashes himself desperately back in his chair, and shoots his angry legs straight out, almost tripping up Tom.

"You abominable ass! You have done it with a vengeance! Why, he has been pumping me about you this month! One word from you to say you'd have stayed, and he was going to make you agent for all his Cornish property."

"Don't he wish he may get it? Catch a fish climbing trees! Catch me staying at home when I can serve my Queen and my country, and find a sphere for the full development of my talents! Oh, won't I be as wise as a serpent? Won't I be complimented by * * * himself as his best lurcher, worth any ten needy Poles, greedy Armenians, traitors, renegades, rag-tag and bob-tail! I'll shave my head to-morrow, and buy me an assortment of wigs of every hue!"

Take care, Tom Thurnall. After pride comes a fall; and he who digs a pit may fall into it himself. Has this morning's death-bed given you no lesson that it is as well not to cast ourselves down from where God has put us, for whatsoever seemingly fine ends of ours, lest, doing so, we tempt God once too often?

Your father quoted that text to John Briggs, here, many years ago. Might he not quote it now to you? True, not one word of murmuring, not even of regret, or fear, has passed his good old lips about your self-willed plan. He has such utter confidence in you, such utter carelessness about himself, such utter faith in God, that he can let you go without a sigh. But will you make his courage an excuse for your own rashness? Again, beware; after pride may come a fall.

* * * * * *

On the fourth day Elsley was buried. Mark and Tom were the only mourners; Lucia and Valencia stayed at Mark's house, to return next day under Tom's care to Eaton Square.

The two mourners walked back sadly from the church-yard. "I shall put a stone over him, Tom. He ought to rest quietly now; for he had little rest enough in this life. . . . .

"Now, I want to talk to you about something; when I've taken off my hatband, that is; for it would be hardly lucky to mention such matters with a hatband on."

Tom looked up, wondering.

"Tell me about his wife, meanwhile. What made him marry her? Was she a pretty woman?"

"Pretty enough, I believe, before she married: but I hardly think he married her for her face."

"Of course not!" said the old man with emphasis; "of

course not! Whatever faults he had, he'd be too sensible for that. Don't you marry for a face, Tom! I didn't."

Tom opened his eyes at this last assertion; but humbly expressed his intention of not falling into that snare.

"Ah? you don't believe me: well, she was a beautiful woman.—I'd like to see her fellow now in the county!—and I won't deny I was proud of her. But she had ten thousand pounds, Tom. And as for her looks, why, if you'll believe me, after we'd been married three months, I didn't know whether she had any looks or not. What are you smiling at, you young rogue?"

"Report did say that one look of Mrs. Armsworth's, to the last, would do more to manage Mr. Armsworth than the opinions of the whole bench of bishops."

"Report's a liar, and you're a puppy! You don't know yet whether it was a pleasant look, or a cross one, lad. But still—well, she was an angel, and kept old Mark straiter than he's ever been since: not that he's so very bad, now. Though I sometimes think Mary's better even than her mother. That girl's a good girl, Tom."

"Report agrees with you in that, at least."

"Fool if it didn't. And as for looks—I can speak to you as to my own son—Why, handsome is that handsome does."

"And that handsome has; for you must honestly put that into the account."

"You think so? So do I! Well, then, Tom,"—and here Mark was seized with a tendency to St. Vitus's dance, and began overhauling every button on his coat, twitching up his black gloves, till (as undertakers' gloves are generally meant to do) they burst in half-a-dozen places; taking off his hat, wiping his head fiercely, and putting the hat on again behind before; till at last he snatched his arm from Tom's, and gripping him by the shoulder, recommenced—

"You think so, eh? Well, I must say it, so I'd better have it out now, hatband or none! What do you think of the man who married my daughter, face and all?"

"I should think," quoth Tom, wondering who the happy man could be, "that he would be so lucky in possessing such a heart, that he would be a fool to care about the face."

"Then be as good as your word, and take her yourself. I've watched you this last week, and you'll make her a good husband. There, I have spoken; let me hear no more about it."

And Mark half pushed Tom from him, and puffed on by his side, highly excited.

If Mark had knocked the young Doctor down, he would have been far less astonished and far less puzzled too. "Well,"

thought he, "I fancied nothing could throw my steady old engine off the rails; but I am off them now, with a vengeance." What to say he knew not; at last—

"It is just like your generosity, Sir; you have been a brother to my father; and now—"

"And now I'll be a father to you! Old Mark does nothing by halves."

"But, Sir, however lucky I should be in possessing Miss Armsworth's heart, what reason have I to suppose that I do so? I never spoke a word to her. I needn't say that she never did to me—which—"

"Of course she didn't, and of course you didn't. Should like to have seen you making love to my daughter, indeed! No, Sir; it's my will and pleasure. I've settled it, and done it shall be! I shall go home and tell Mary, and she'll obey me—I should like to see her do anything else! Hoity, toity, fathers must be masters, Sir! even in these fly-away new times, when young ones choose their own husbands, and their own politics, and their own hounds, and their own religion too, and be hanged to them!"

What did this unaccustomed bit of bluster mean? for unaccustomed it was; and Tom knew well that Mary Armsworth had her own way, and managed her father as completely as he managed Whitbury.

"Humph! It is impossible; and yet it must be. This explains his being so anxious that Lord Minchampstead should approve of me. I have found favour in the poor dear thing's eyes, I suppose: and the good old fellow knows it, and won't betray her, and so shams tyrant. Just like him!" But—that Mary Armsworth should care for him! Vain fellow that he was to fancy it! And yet, when he began to put things together, little silences, little looks, little nothings, which all together might make something. He would not slander her to himself by supposing that her attentions to his father were paid for his sake: but he could not forget that it was she, always, who read his letters aloud to the old man: or that she had taken home and copied out the story of his shipwreck. Beside, it was the only method of explaining Mark's conduct, save on the supposition that he had suddenly been "changed by the fairies" in his old age, instead of in the cradle, as usual.

It was a terrible temptation; and to no man more than to Thomas Thurnall. He was no boy, to hanker after mere animal beauty; he had no delicate visions or lofty aspirations; and he knew (no man better) the plain English of fifty thousand pounds, and Mark Armsworth's daughter—a good house, a good con

sulting practice (for he would take his M.D. of course), a good station in the county, a good clarence with a good pair of horses, good plate, a good dinner with good company thereat; and, over and above all, his father to live with him; and with Mary, whom he loved as a daughter, in luxury and peace to his life's end.—Why, it was all that he had ever dreamed of, three times more than he ever hoped to gain!—Not to mention (for how oddly little dreams of selfish pleasure slip in at such moments!) —that he would buy such a Ross's microscope! and keep such a horse for a sly by-day with the Whitford Priors! Oh, to see once again a fox break from Coldharbour gorse!

And then rose up before his imagination those drooping steadfast eyes; and Grace Harvey, the suspected, the despised, seemed to look through and through his inmost soul, as through a home which belonged of right to her, and where no other woman must dwell, or could dwell; for she was there; and he knew it; and knew that, even if he never married till his dying day, he should sell his soul by marrying any one but her. "And why should I not sell my soul?" asked he, almost fiercely. "I sell my talents, my time, my strength; I'd sell my life to-morrow, and go to be shot for a shilling a day, if it would make the old man comfortable for life; and why not my soul too? Don't that belong to me as much as any other part of me? Why am I to be condemned to sacrifice my prospects in life to a girl of whose honesty I am not even sure? What is this intolerable fascination? Witch! I almost believe in mesmerism now!—Again, I say, why should I not sell my soul, as I'd sell my coat, if the bargain's but a good one?"

And if he did, who would ever know?—Not even Grace herself. The secret was his, and no one else's. Or if they did know, what matter? Dozens of men sell their souls every year, and thrive thereon: tradesmen, lawyers, squires, popular preachers, great noblemen, kings and princes. He would be in good company, at all events: and while so many live in glass houses, who dare throw stones?

But then, curiously enough, there came over him a vague dread of possible evil, such as he had never felt before. He had been trying for years to raise himself above the power of fortune; and he had succeeded ill enough: but he had never lost heart. Robbed, shipwrecked, lost in deserts, cheated at cards, shot in revolutions, begging his bread, he had always been the same unconquerable light-hearted Tom, whose motto was, "Fall light, and don't whimper: better luck next round." But now, what if he played his last court-card, and Fortune, out of her close-hidden hand, laid down a trump thereon with quiet sneering smile? And she would! He knew, somehow, that he should

not thrive. His children would die of the measles, his horses break their knees, his plate be stolen, his house catch fire, and Mark Armsworth die insolvent. What a fool he was, to fancy such nonsense! Here he had been slaving all his life to keep his father: and now he could keep him; why, he would be justified, right, a good son, in doing the thing. How hard, how unjust of those upper Powers in which he believed so vaguely, to forbid his doing it!

And how did he know that they forbid him? That is too deep a question to be analyzed here: but this thing is noteworthy, that there came next over Tom's mind a stranger feeling still—a fancy that if he did this thing, and sold his soul, he could not answer for himself thenceforth on the score of merest respectability; could not answer for himself not to drink, gamble, squander his money, neglect his father, prove unfaithful to his wife; that the innate capacity for blackguardism, which was as strong in him as in any man, might, and probably would, run utterly riot thenceforth. He felt as if he should cast away his last anchor, and drift helplessly down into utter shame and ruin. It may have been very fanciful: but so he felt; and felt it so strongly too, that in less time than I have taken to write this he had turned to Mark Armsworth:—

"Sir, you are what I have always found you. Do you wish me to be what you have always found me?"

"I'd be sorry to see you anything else, boy."

"Then, Sir, I can't do this. In honour, I can't."

"Are you married already?" thundered Mark.

"Not quite as bad as that;" and in spite of his agitation Tom laughed, but hysterically, at the notion. "But fool I am; for I am in love with another woman. I am, Sir," went he on hurriedly. "Boy that I am! and she don't even know it: but if you be the man I take you for, you may be angry with me, but you'll understand me. Anything but be a rogue to you and to Mary, and to my own self too. Fool I'll be, but rogue I won't!"

Mark strode on in silence, frightfully red in the face for full five minutes. Then he turned sharply on Tom, and catching him by the shoulder, thrust him from him.

"There,—go! and don't let me see or hear of you;—that is, till I tell you! Go along, I say! Hum-hum!" (in a tone half of wrath, and half of triumph), "his father's child! If you will ruin yourself, I can't help it."

"Nor I, Sir," said Tom, in a really piteous tone, bemoaning the day he ever saw Aberalva, as he watched Mark stride into his own gate. "If I had but had common luck! If I had but brought my £1,500 safe home here, and never seen Grace, and

married this girl out of hand! Common luck is all I ask, and I never get it!"

And Tom went home sulkier than a bear: but he did not let his father find out his trouble. It was his last evening with the old man. To-morrow he must go to London, and then—to scramble and twist about the world again till he died? "Well, why not? A man must die somehow: but it's hard on the poor old father," said Tom.

As Tom was packing his scanty carpet-bag next morning, there was a knock at the door. He looked out, and saw Armsworth's clerk. What could that mean? Had the old man determined to avenge the slight, and to do so on his father, by claiming some old debt? There might be many between him and the doctor. And Tom's heart beat fast, as Jane put a letter into his hand.

"No answer, Sir, the clerk says."

Tom opened it, and turned over the contents more than once ere he could believe his own eyes.

It was neither more nor less than a cheque on Mark's London banker for just five hundred pounds.

A half-sheet was wrapped round it, on which were written these words:—

"To Thomas Thurnall, Esq. for behaving like a gentleman. The cheque will be duly honoured at Messrs. Smith, Brown, and Jones, Lombard Street. No acknowledgment is to be sent. Don't tell your father.

"MARK ARMSWORTH."

"Queer old world it is!" said Tom, when the first burst of childish delight was over. "And jolly old flirt, Dame Fortune, after all! If I had written this in a book now, who'd have believed it?"

"Father," said he, as he kissed the old man farewell, "I've a little money come in. I'll send you fifty from London in a day or two, and lodge a hundred and fifty more with Smith and Co. So you'll be quite in clover while I am poisoning the Turkeys, or at some better work."

The old man thanked God for his good son, and only hoped that he was not straitening himself to buy luxuries for a useless old fellow.

Another sacred kiss on that white head, and Tom was away for London, with a fuller purse, and a more self-contented heart too, than he had known for many a year.

And Elsley was left behind, under the grey church spire, sleeping with his fathers, and vexing his soul with poetry no more. Mark has covered him now with a fair Portland slab. He

took Claude Mellot to it this winter before church time, and stood over it long with a puzzled look, as if dimly discovering that there were more things in heaven and earth than were dreamed of in his philosophy.

"Wonderful fellow he was, after all! Mary shall read us out some of his verses to-night. But, I say, why should people be born clever, only to make them all the more miserable?"

"Perhaps they learn the more, papa, by their sorrows," said quiet little Mary; "and so they are the gainers after all."

And none of them having any better answer to give, they all three went into the church, to see if one could be found there.

And so Tom Thurnall, too, went Eastward-Ho, to take, like all the rest, what God might send.

CHAPTER XXVI.

TOO LATE.

And how was poor Grace Harvey prospering the while? While comfortable folks were praising her, at their leisure, as a heroine, Grace Harvey was learning, so she opined, by fearful lessons, how much of the unheroic element was still left in her. The first lesson had come just a week after the yacht sailed for Port Madoc, when the cholera had all but subsided; and it came in this wise. Before breakfast one morning she had to go up to Heale's shop for some cordial. Her mother had passed, so she said, a sleepless night, and come down stairs nervous and without appetite, oppressed with melancholy, both in the spiritual and the physical sense of the word. It was not often so with her now. She had escaped the cholera. The remoteness of her house; her care never to enter the town; the purity of the water, which trickled always fresh from the cliff close by; and last, but not least, the scrupulous cleanliness which (to do her justice) she had always observed, and in which she had trained up Grace,—all these had kept her safe.

But Grace could see that her dread of the cholera was intense. She even tried at first to prevent Grace from entering an infected house; but that proposal was answered by a look of horror which shamed her into silence, and she contented herself with all but tabooing Grace; making her change her clothes whenever she came in; refusing to sit with her, almost to eat with her. But, over and above all this, she had grown moody, peevish, subject to violent bursts of crying, fits of superstitious depression; spent, sometimes, whole days in reading experimental books, arguing with the preachers, gadding to and fro to every sermon,

Arminian or Calvinist; and at last even to Church—walking in dry places, poor soul; seeking rest, and finding none.

All this betokened some malady of the mind, rather than of the body; but what that malady was, Grace dare not even try to guess. Perhaps it was one of the fits of religious melancholy so common in the West country—like her own, in fact: perhaps it was all "nerves." Her mother was growing old, and had a great deal of business to worry her; and so Grace thrust away the horrible suspicion by little self-deceptions.

She went into the shop. Tom was busy upon his knees behind the counter. She made her request.

"Ah, Miss Harvey!" and he sprang up. "It will be a pleasure to serve you once more in one's life. I am just going."

"Going where?"

"To Turkey. I find this place too pleasant and too poor. Not work enough, and certainly not pay enough. So I have got an appointment as surgeon in the Turkish contingent, and shall be off in an hour."

"To Turkey! to the war?"

"Yes. It's a long time since I have seen any fighting. I am quite out of practice in gunshot wounds. There is the medicine. Good bye! You will shake hands once, for the sake of our late cholera work together."

Grace held out her hand mechanically across the counter, and he took it. But she did not look into his face. Only she said, half to herself,—

"Well, better so. I have no doubt you will be very useful among them."

"Confound the icicle!" thought Tom. "I really believe that she wants to get rid of me." And he would have withdrawn his hand in a pet: but she held it still.

Quaint it was; those two strong natures, each loving the other better than anything else on earth, and yet parted by the thinnest pane of ice, which a single look would have melted. She longing to follow that man over the wide world, slave for him, die for him; he longing for the least excuse for making a fool of himself, and crying, "Take me, as I take you, without a penny, for better, for worse!" If their eyes had but met! But they did not meet; and the pane of ice kept them asunder as surely as a wall of iron.

Was it that Tom was piqued at her seeming coldness; or did he expect, before he made any advances, that she should show that she wished at least for his respect, by saying something to clear up the ugly question which lay between them? Or was he, as I suspect, so ready to melt, and make a fool of himself, that he must needs harden his own heart by help of the devil

himself? And yet there are excuses for him. It would have been a sore trial to any man's temper to quit Aberalva in the belief that he left fifteen hundred pounds behind him. Be that as it may, he said carelessly, after a moment's pause,—

"Well, farewell! And, by the bye, about that little money matter. The month of which you spoke once was up yesterday. I suppose I am not worthy yet; so I shall be humble, and wait patiently. Don't hurry yourself, I beg of you, on my account."

She snatched her hand from his without a word, and rushed out of the shop.

He returned to his packing, whistling away as shrill as any blackbird.

Little did he think that Grace's heart was bursting, as she hurried down the street, covering her face in her veil, as if every one would espy her dark secret in her countenance.

But she did not go home to hysterics and vain tears. An awful purpose had arisen in her mind, under the pressure of that great agony. Heavens, how she loved that man! To be suspected by him was torture. But she could bear that. It was her cross; she could carry it, lie down on it, and endure: but wrong him she could not—would not! It was sinful enough while he was there; but doubly, unbearably sinful, when he was going to a foreign country, when he would need every farthing he had. So not for her own sake, but for his, she spoke to her mother when she went home, and found her sitting over her Bible in the little parlour, vainly trying to find a text which suited her distemper.

"Mother, you have the Bible before you there."

"Yes, child! Why? What?" asked she, looking up uneasily.

Grace fixed her eyes on the ground. She could not look her mother in the face.

"Do you ever read the thirty-second Psalm, mother?"

"Which? Why not, child?"

"Let us read it together then, now."

And Grace, taking up her own Bible, sat quietly down and read, as none in that parish save she could read:

"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, and whose sin is covered.

"Blessed is the man unto whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.

"When I kept silence, my bones waxed old, through my groaning all the day long.

"For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned to the drought of summer.

"I acknowledge my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid.

"I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin."

Grace stopped, choked with tears which the pathos of her own voice had called up. She looked at her mother. There were no tears in her eyes: only a dull thwart look of terror and suspicion. The shaft, however bravely and cunningly sped, had missed its mark.

Poor Grace! Her usual eloquence utterly failed her, as most things do in which one is wont to trust, before the pressure of a real and horrible evil. She had no heart to make fine sentences, to preach a brilliant sermon of common-places. What could she say that her mother had not known long before she was born? And throwing herself on her knees at her mother's feet, she grasped both her hands and looked into her face imploringly,—"Mother! mother! mother!" was all that she could say: but their tone meant more than all words.—Reproof, counsel, comfort, utter tenderness, and under-current of clear deep trust, bubbling up from beneath all passing suspicions, however dark and foul, were in it: but they were vain.

Baser terror, the parent of baser suspicion, had hardened that woman's heart for the while; and all she answered was,—

"Get up! What is this foolery?"

"I will not! I will not rise till you have told me."

"What?"

"Whether"—and she forced the words slowly out in a low whisper, "whether you know—anything of—of—Mr. Thurnall's money—his belt?"

"Is the girl mad? Belt? Money? Do you take me for a thief, wench?"

"No! no! no! Only say you—you know nothing of it!"

"Psha! girl! Go to your school:" and the old woman tried to rise.

"Only say that! only let me know that it is a dream—a hideous dream which the devil put into my wicked, wicked heart—and let me know that I am the basest, meanest of daughters for harbouring such a thought a moment! It will be comfort, bliss, to what I endure! Only say that, and I will crawl to your feet, and beg for your forgiveness,—ask you to beat me, like a child, as I shall deserve! Drive me out, if you will, and let me die, as I shall deserve! Only say the word, and take this fire from before my eyes, which burns day and night,—till my brain is dried up with misery and shame! Mother, mother, speak!"

But then burst out the horrible suspicion, which falsehood,

suspecting all others of being false as itself, had engendered in that mother's heart.

"Yes, viper! I see your plan! Do you think I do not know that you are in love with that fellow?"

Grace started as if she had been shot, and covered her face with her hands.

"Yes! and want me to betray myself—to tell a lie about myself, that you may curry favour with him—a peniless, unbelieving—"

"Mother!" almost shrieked Grace, "I can bear no more! Say that it is a lie, and then kill me if you will!"

"It is a lie, from beginning to end! What else should it be?" And the woman, in the hurry of her passion, confirmed the equivocation with an oath; and then ran on, as if to turn her own thoughts, as well as Grace's, into commonplaces about "a poor old mother, who cares for nothing but you; who has worked her fingers to the bone for years to leave you a little money when she is gone! I wish I were gone! I wish I were out of this wretched ungrateful world, I do! To have my own child turn against me in my old age!"

Grace lifted her hands from her face, and looked steadfastly at her mother. And behold, she knew not how or why, she felt that her mother had forsworn herself. A strong shudder passed through her; she rose and was leaving the room in silence.

"Where are you going, hussy? Stop!" screamed her mother between her teeth, her rage and cruelty rising, as it will with weak natures, in the very act of triumph,—"to your young man?"

"To pray," said Grace quietly; and locking herself into the empty schoolroom, gave vent to all her feelings, but not in tears.

How she upbraided herself!—She had not used her strength; she had not told her mother all her heart. And yet how could she tell her heart? How face her mother with such vague suspicions, hardly supported by a single fact? How argue it out against her like a lawyer, and convict her to her face? What daughter could do that, who had human love and reverence left in her? No! to touch her inward witness, as the Quakers well and truly term it, was the only method: and it had failed. "God help me!" was her only cry: but the help did not come yet; there came over her instead a feeling of utter loneliness. Willis dead; Thurnall gone; her mother estranged; and, like a child lost upon a great moor, she looked round all heaven and earth, and there was none to counsel, none to guide—perhaps not even God. For would He help her as long as she lived in sin? And was she not living in sin, deadly sin, as long as she knew what she was sure she knew, and left the wrong unrighted?

It is sometimes true, the popular saying, that sunshine comes after storm. Sometimes true, or who could live? but not always: not even often. Equally true is the popular antithet, that misfortunes never come single; that in most human lives there are periods of trouble, blow following blow, wave following wave, from opposite and unexpected quarters, with no natural or logical sequence, till all God's billows have gone over the soul.

How paltry and helpless, in such dark times, are all theories of mere self-education; all proud attempts, like that of Göthe's Wilhelm Meister, to hang self-poised in the centre of the abyss, and there organize for oneself a character by means of circumstances! Easy enough, and graceful enough does that dream look, while all the circumstances themselves—all which stands around—are easy and graceful, obliging and commonplace, like the sphere of petty experiences with which Göthe surrounds his insipid hero. Easy enough it seems for a man to educate himself without God, as long as he lies comfortably on a sofa, with a cup of coffee and a review: but what if that "dæmonic element of the universe," which Göthe confessed, and yet in his luxuriousness tried to ignore, because he could not explain—what if that broke forth over the graceful and prosperous student, as it may any moment? What if some thing, or some person, or many things, or many persons, one after the other (questions which he must get answered then, or die), took him up and dashed him down, again, and again, and again, till he was ready to cry, "I reckoned till morning that like a lion he will break all my bones; from morning till evening he will make an end of me"? What if he thus found himself hurled perforce amid the real universal experiences of humanity; and made free, in spite of himself, by doubt and fear and horror of great darkness, of the brotherhood of woe, common alike to the simplest peasant-woman, and to every great soul perhaps, who has left his impress and sign manual upon the hearts of after generations? Jew, Heathen, or Christian; men of the most opposite creeds and aims; whether it be Moses or Socrates, Isaiah or Epictetus, Augustine or Mohammed, Dante or Bernard, Shakspeare or Bacon, or Göthe's self, no doubt, though in his tremendous pride he would not confess it even to himself,—each and all of them have this one fact in common—that once in their lives, at least, they have gone down into the bottomless pit, and "stato all' inferno"—as the children used truly to say of Dante; and there, out of the utter darkness, have asked the question of all questions—"Is there a God? And if there be, what is He doing with me?"

What refuge then in self-education; when a man feels himself

powerless in the gripe of some unseen and inevitable power, and knows not whether it be chance, or necessity, or a devouring fiend? To wrap himself sternly in himself, and cry, "I will endure, though all the universe be against me;"—how fine it sounds!—But who has done it? Could a man do it perfectly but for one moment,—could he absolutely and utterly for one moment isolate himself, and accept his own isolation as a fact, he were then and there a madman or a suicide. As it is, his nature, happily too weak for that desperate self-assertion, falls back recklessly on some form, more or less graceful according to the temperament, of the ancient panacea, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." Why should a man educate self, when he knows not whither he goes, what will befall him to-night? No. There is but one escape, one chink through which we may see light, one rock on which our feet may find standing-place, even in the abyss: and that is the belief, intuitive, inspired, due neither to reasoning nor to study, that the billows are God's billows; and that though we go down to hell, He is there also; —the belief that not we, but He, is educating us; that these seemingly fantastic and incoherent miseries, storm following earthquake, and earthquake fire, as if the caprice of all the demons were let loose against us, have in His Mind a spiritual coherence, an organic unity and purpose (though we see it not); that sorrows do not come singly, only because He is making short work with our spirits; and because the more effect He sees produced by one blow, the more swiftly He follows it up by another; till, in one great and varied crisis, seemingly long to us, but short enough compared with immortality, our spirits may be—

> "Heated hot with burning fears,
> And bathed in baths of hissing tears,
> And battered with the strokes of doom,
> To shape and use."

And thus, perhaps, it was with poor Grace Harvey. At least, happily for her, she began after a while to think that it was so. Only after a while, though. There was at first a phase of repining, of doubt, almost of indignation against high heaven. Who shall judge her? What blame if the crucified one writhe when the first nail is driven? What blame if the stoutest turn sick and giddy at the first home-thrust of that sword which pierces the joints and marrow, and lays bare to self the secrets of the heart? God gives poor souls time to recover their breaths, ere He strikes again; and if He be not angry, why should we condemn?

Poor Grace! Her sorrows had been thickening fast during the last few months. She was schoolmistress again, true; but

where were her children? Those of them whom she loved best, were swept away by the cholera; and could she face the remnant, each in mourning for a parent or a brother? That alone was grief enough for her; and yet that was the lightest of all her griefs. She loved Tom Thurnall—how much, she dared not tell herself; she longed to "save" him. She had thought, and not untruly, during the past cholera weeks, that he was softened, opened to new impressions: but he had avoided her more than ever—perhaps suspected her again more than ever—and now he was gone, gone for ever. That, too, was grief enough alone. But darkest and deepest of all, darker and deeper than the past shame of being suspected by him she loved, was the shame of suspecting her own mother—of believing herself, as she did, privy to that shameful theft, and yet unable to make restitution. There was the horror of all horrors, the close prison which seemed to stifle her whole soul. The only chink through which a breath of air seemed to come, and keep her heart alive, was the hope that some how, some where, she might find that belt, and restore it without her mother's knowledge.

But more—the first of September was come and gone; the bill for five-and-twenty pounds was due, and was not met. Grace, choking down her honest pride, went off to the grocer, and, with tears which he could not resist, persuaded him to renew the bill for one month more; and now that month was all but past, and yet there was no money. Eight or ten people who owed Mrs. Harvey money had died of the cholera. Some, of course, had left no effects; and all hope of their working out their debts was gone. Some had left money behind them: but it was still in the lawyer's hands, some of it at sea, some on mortgage, some in houses which must be sold; till their affairs were wound up—(a sadly slow affair when a country attorney has a poor man's unprofitable business to transact)—nothing could come in to Mrs. Harvey. To and fro she went with knitted brow and heavy heart; and brought home again only promises, as she had done a hundred times before. One day she went up to Mrs. Heale. Old Heale owed her thirteen pounds and more: but that was not the least reason for paying. His cholera patients had not paid him; and whether Heale had the money by him or not, he was not going to pay his debts till other people paid theirs. Mrs. Harvey stormed; Mrs. Heale gave her as good as she brought; and Mrs. Harvey threatened to County Court her husband; whereon Mrs. Heale, *en revanche*, dragged out the books, and displayed to the poor widow's horror-struck eyes an account for medicine and attendance, on her and Grace, which nearly swallowed up the debt. Poor Grace was overwhelmed when her mother came home and upbraided her, in

her despair, with being a burden. Was she not a burden? Must she not be one henceforth? No, she would take in needlework, labour in the fields, heave ballast among the coarse pauper-girls on the quay-pool, anything rather: but how to meet the present difficulty?

"We must sell our furniture, mother!"

"For a quarter of what it's worth? Never, girl! No! The Lord will provide," said she, between her clenched teeth, with a sort of hysteric chuckle. "The Lord will provide!"

"I believe it; I believe it," said poor Grace; "but faith is weak, and the day is very dark, mother."

"Dark, ay? And may be darker, yet; but the Lord will provide. He prepares a table in the wilderness for his saints that the world don't think of."

"Oh, mother! and do you think there is any door of hope?"

"Go to bed, girl; go to bed, and leave me to see to that. Find my spectacles. Wherever have you laid them to, now? I'll look over the books awhile."

"Do let me go over them for you."

"No, you sha'n't! I suppose you'll be wanting to make out your poor old mother's been cheating somebody. Why not, if I'm a thief, Miss, eh?"

"Oh, mother! mother! don't say that again."

And Grace glided out meekly to her own chamber, which was on the ground-floor adjoining the parlour, and there spent more than one hour in prayer, from which no present comfort seemed to come; yet who shall say that it was all unanswered?

At last her mother came up-stairs, and put her head in angrily: —"Why ben't you in bed, girl? sitting up this way?"

"I was praying, mother," says Grace, looking up as she knelt.

"Praying! What's the use of praying? and who'll hear you if you pray? What you want's a husband, to keep you out of the workhouse; and you won't get that by kneeling here. Get to bed, I say, or I'll pull you up!"

Grace obeyed uncomplaining, but utterly shocked; though she was not unacquainted with those frightful fits of morose unbelief, even of fierce blasphemy, to which the excitable West-country mind is liable, after having been over-strained by superstitious self-inspection, and by the desperate attempt to prove itself right and safe from frames and feelings, while fact and conscience proclaim it wrong.

The West-country people are apt to attribute these paroxysms to the possession of a devil; and so did Grace that night.

Trembling with terror and loving pity, she lay down, and began to pray afresh for that poor wild mother.

At last the fear crossed her that her mother might make away

with herself. But a few years before, another class-leader in Aberalva had attempted to do so, and had all but succeeded. The thought was intolerable. She must go to her; face reproaches, blows, anything. She rose from her bed, and went to the door. It was fastened on the outside.

A cold perspiration stood on her forehead. She opened her lips to shriek to her mother: but checked herself when she heard her stirring gently in the outer room. Her pulses throbbed too loudly at first for her to hear distinctly: but she felt that it was no moment for giving way to emotion; by a strong effort of will, she conquered herself; and then, with that preternatural acuteness of sense which some women possess, she could hear everything her mother was doing. She heard her put on her shawl, her bonnet; she heard her open the front door gently. It was now long past midnight. Whither could she be going at that hour?

She heard her go gently to the left, past the window; and yet her footfall was all but inaudible. No rain had fallen, and her shoes ought to have sounded on the hard earth. She must have taken them off. There, she was stopping, just by the school-door. Now she moved again. She must have stopped to put on her shoes; for now Grace could hear her steps distinctly, down the earth bank, and over the rattling shingle of the beach. Where was she going? Grace must follow!

The door was fast: but in a moment she had removed the table, opened the shutter and the window.

"Thank God that I stayed here on the ground floor, instead of going back to my own room when Major Campbell left. It is a providence! The Lord has not forsaken me yet!" said the sweet saint, as, catching up her shawl, she wrapped it round her, and slipping through the window, crouched under the shadow of the house, and looked for her mother.

She was hurrying over the rocks, a hundred yards off. Whither? To drown herself in the sea? No; she held on along the mid-beach, right across the cove, toward Arthur's Nose. But why? Grace must know.

She felt, she knew not why, that this strange journey, that wild "The Lord will provide," had to do with the subject of her suspicion. Perhaps this was the crisis; perhaps all will be cleared up to-night, for joy or for utter shame.

The tide was low; the beach was bright in the western moonlight: only along the cliff foot lay a strip of shadow a quarter of a mile long, till the Nose, like a great black wall, buried the corner of the cove in darkness.

Along that strip of shadow she ran, crouching; now stumbling over a boulder, now crushing her bare feet between the sharp

pebbles, as, heedless where she stepped, she kept her eye fixed on her mother. As if fascinated, she could see nothing else in heaven or earth but that dark figure, hurrying along with a dogged determination, and then stopping a moment to look round, as if in fear of a pursuer. And then Grace lay down on the cold stones, and pressed herself into the very earth; and the moment her mother turned to go forward, sprang up and followed.

And then a true woman's thought flashed across her, and shaped itself into a prayer. For herself she never thought: but if the Coast Guardsman above should see her mother, stop her, question her? God grant that he might be on the other side of the point! And she hurried on again.

Near the Nose the rocks ran high and jagged; her mother held on to them, passed through a narrow chasm, and disappeared.

Grace now, not fifty yards from her, darted out of the shadow into the moonlight, and ran breathlessly toward the spot where she had seen her mother last. Like Anderssen's little sea-maiden she went, every step on sharp knives, across the rough beds of barnacles; but she felt no pain, in the greatness of her terror and her love.

She crouched between the rocks a moment; heard her mother slipping and splashing among the pools; and glided after her like a ghost—a guardian angel rather—till she saw her emerge again for a moment into the moonlight, upon a strip of beach beneath the Nose.

It was a weird and lonely spot; and a dangerous spot withal. For only at low spring-tide could it be reached from the land, and then the flood rose far up the cliff, covering all the shingle, and filling the mouth of a dark cavern. Had her mother gone to that cavern? It was impossible to see, so utterly was the cliff shrouded in shadow.

Shivering with cold and excitement, Grace crouched down, and gazed into the gloom, till her eyes swam, and a hundred fantastic figures, and sparks of fire, seemed to dance between her and the rock. Sparks of fire!—yes; but that last one was no fancy. An actual flash; the crackle and sputter of a match! What could it mean? Another match was lighted; and a moment after, the glare of a lanthorn showed her her mother entering beneath the polished arch of rock which glared lurid overhead, like the gateway of the pit of fire.

The light vanished into the windings of the cave. And then Grace, hardly knowing what she did, rushed up the beach, and crouched down once more at the cave's mouth. There she sat, she knew not how long, listening, listening, like a hunted hare; her whole faculties concentrated in the one sense of hearing; her eyes wandering vacantly over the black saws of rock, and glisten-

ing oar-weed beds, and bright phosphoric sea. Thank Heaven, there was not a ripple to break the silence. Ah, what was that sound within? She pressed her ear against the rock, to hear more surely. A rumbling as of stones rolled down. And then, —was it a fancy, or were her powers of hearing, intensified by excitement, actually equal to discern the chink of coin? Who knows? but in another moment she had glided in, silently, swiftly, holding her very breath; and saw her mother kneeling on the ground, the lanthorn by her side, and in her hand the long-lost belt.

She did not speak, she did not move. She always knew, in her heart of hearts, that so it was: but when the sin took bodily shape, and was there before her very eyes, it was too dreadful to speak of, to act upon yet. And amid the most torturing horror and disgust of that great sin, rose up in her the divinest love for the sinner; she felt—strange paradox—that she had never loved her mother as she did at that moment. "Oh, that it had been I who had done it, and not she!" And her mother's sin was to her her own sin, her mother's shame her shame, till all sense of her mother's guilt vanished in the light of her divine love. "Oh, that I could take her up tenderly, tell her that all is forgiven and forgotten by man and God!—serve her as I have never served her yet!—nurse her to sleep on my bosom, and then go forth and bear her punishment, even if need be on the gallows-tree!" And there she stood, in a silent agony of tender pity, drinking her portion of the cup of Him who bore the sins of all the world.

Silently she stood; and silently she turned to go, to go home and pray for guidance in that dark labyrinth of confused duties. Her mother heard the rustle; looked up; and sprang to her feet with a scream, dropping gold pieces on the ground.

Her first impulse was wild terror. She was discovered; by whom, she knew not. She clasped her evil treasure to her bosom, and thrusting Grace against the rock, fled wildly out.

"Mother! Mother!" shrieked Grace, rushing after her. The shawl fell from her shoulders. Her mother looked back, and saw the white figure.

"God's angel! God's angel, come to destroy me! as he came to Balaam!" and in the madness of her guilty fancy she saw in Grace's hand the fiery sword which was to smite her.

Another step, looking backward still, and she had tripped over a stone. She fell, and striking the back of her head against the rock, lay senseless.

Tenderly Grace lifted her up: went for water to a pool near by; bathed her face, calling on her by every term of endearment. Slowly the old woman recovered her consciousness, but showed

it only in moans. Her head was cut and bleeding. Grace bound it up, and then taking that fatal belt, bound it next to her own heart, never to be moved from thence till she should put it into the hands of him to whom it belonged.

And then she lifted up her mother.

"Come home, darling mother;" and she tried to make her stand and walk.

The old woman only moaned, and waved her away impatiently. Grace put her on her feet; but she fell again. The lower limbs seemed all but paralysed.

Slowly that sweet saint lifted her, and laid her on her own back; and slowly she bore her homeward, with aching knees and bleeding feet; while before her eyes hung the picture of Him who bore his cross up Calvary, till a solemn joy and pride in that sacred burden seemed to intertwine itself with her deep misery. And fainting every moment with pain and weakness, she still went on, as if by supernatural strength; and murmured—

"Thou didst bear more for me, and shall not I bear even this for Thee?"

Surely, if blest spirits can weep and smile over the woes and heroisms of us mortal men, faces brighter than the stars looked down on that fair girl that night, and in loving sympathy called her, too, blest.

At last it was over. Undiscovered she reached home, laid her mother on the bed, and tended her till morning: but long ere morning dawned stupor had changed into delirium, and Grace's ears were all on fire with words—which those who have ever heard will have no heart to write.

And now, by one of those strange vagaries, in which epidemics so often indulge, appeared other symptoms; and by day-dawn cholera itself.

Heale, though recovering, was still too weak to be of use: but, happily, the medical man sent down by the Board of Health was still in the town.

Grace sent for him; but he shook his head after the first look. The wretched woman's ravings at once explained the case, and made it, in his eyes, all but hopeless.

The sudden shock to body and mind, the sudden prostration of strength, had brought out the disease which she had dreaded so intensely, and against which she had taken so many precautions, and which yet lay, all the while, lurking unfelt in her system.

A hideous eight-and-forty hours followed. The preachers and class-leaders came to pray over the dying woman: but she screamed to Grace to send them away. She had just sense enough left to dread that she might betray her own shame.

Would she have the new clergyman then? No; she would have no one;—no one could help her! Let her only die in peace!

And Grace closed the door upon all but the doctor, who treated the wild sufferer's wild words as the mere fancies of delirium; and then Grace watched and prayed, till she found herself alone with the dead.

She wrote a letter to Thurnall—

"Sir,—I have found your belt, and all the money, I believe and trust, which it contained. If you will be so kind as to tell me where and how I shall send it to you, you will take a heavy burden off the mind of

"Your obedient humble Servant,

who trusts that you will forgive her having been unable to fulfil her promise."

She addressed the letter to Whitbury; for thither Tom had ordered his letters to be sent; but she received no answer.

The day after Mrs. Harvey was buried, the sale of all her effects was announced in Aberalva.

Grace received the proceeds, went round to all the creditors, and paid them all which was due. She had a few pounds left. What to do with that she knew full well.

She showed no sign of sorrow: but she spoke rarely to any one. A dead dull weight seemed to hang over her. To preachers, class-leaders, gossips, who upbraided her for not letting them see her mother, she replied by silence. People thought her becoming idiotic.

The day after the last creditor was paid she packed up her little box: hired a cart to take her to the nearest coach; and vanished from Aberalva, without bidding farewell to a human being, even to her school-children.

* * * * * *

Vavasour had been buried more than a week. Mark and Mary were sitting in the dining-room, Mark at his port and Mary at her work, when the footboy entered.

"Sir, there's a young woman wants to speak with you."

"Show her in, if she looks respectable," said Mark, who had slippers on, and his feet on the fender, and was, therefore, loth to move.

"Oh, quite respectable, Sir, as ever I see;" and the lad ushered in a figure, dressed and veiled in deep black.

"Well, Ma'am, sit down, pray; and what can I do for you?"

"Can you tell me, Sir," answered a voice of extraordinary sweetness and gentleness, very firm and composed withal, "if Mr. Thomas Thurnall is in Whitbury?"

"Thurnall? He has sailed for the East a week ago. May I ask your business with him? Can I help you in it?"

The black damsel paused so long, that both Mary and her father felt uneasy, and a cloud passed over Mark's brow.

"Can the boy have been playing tricks?" said he to himself.

"Then, Sir, as I hear that you have influence, can you get me a situation as one of the nurses who are going out thither, so I hear?"

"Get you a situation? Yes, of course, if you are competent."

"Thank you, Sir. Perhaps, if you could be so very kind as to tell me to whom I am to apply in Town; for I shall go thither to-night."

"My goodness!" cried Mark. "Old Mark don't do things in this off-hand, cold-blooded way. Let us know who you are, my dear, and about Mr. Thurnall. Have you anything against him?"

She was silent.

"Mary, just step into the next room."

"If you please, Sir," said the same gentle voice, "I had sooner that the lady should stay. I have nothing against Mr. Thurnall, God knows. He has rather something against me."

Another pause.

Mary rose, and went up to her and took her hand.

"Do tell us who you are, and if we can do anything for you."

And she looked winningly up into her face.

The stranger drew a long breath and lifted her veil. Mary and Mark both started at the beauty of the countenance which she revealed—but in a different way. Mark gave a grunt of approbation: Mary turned pale as death.

"I suppose that it is but right and reasonable that I should tell you, at least give proof of my being an honest person. For my capabilities as a nurse—I believe you know Mrs. Vavasour? I heard that she has been staying here."

"Of course. Do you know her?"

A sad smile passed over her face.

"Yes, well enough, at least for her to speak for me. I should have asked her or Miss St. Just to help me to a nurse's place: but I did not like to trouble them in their distress. How is the poor lady now, Sir?"

"I know who she is!" cried Mary, by a sudden inspiration. "Is not your name Harvey? Are you not the schoolmistress who saved Mr. Thurnall's life? who behaved so nobly in the cholera? Yes! I knew you were! Come and sit down, and tell me all! I have so longed to know you! Dear creature, I have felt as if you were my own sister. He—Mr. Thurnall—wrote often about all your heroism."

Grace seemed to choke down somewhat: and then answered steadfastly—

"I did not come here, my dear lady, to hear such kind words, but to do an errand to Mr. Thurnall. You have heard, perhaps, that when he was wrecked last spring, he lost some money. Yes? Then, it was stolen. Stolen!" she repeated with a great gasp: "never mind by whom. Not by me."

"You need not tell us that, my dear," interrupted Mark.

"God kept it. And I have it; here!" and she pressed her hands tight over her bosom. "And here I must keep it till I give it into his hands, if I follow him round the world!" And as she spoke her eyes shone in the lamplight, with an unearthly brilliance which made Mary shudder.

Mark Armsworth poured a libation to the goddess of Puzzledom, in the shape of a glass of port, which first choked him, and then descended over his clean shirt front. But after he had coughed himself black in the face, he began:—

"My good girl, if you are Grace Harvey, you're welcome to my roof, and an honour to it, say I: but as for taking all that money with you across the seas, and such a pretty helpless young thing as you are, God help you, it mustn't be, and shan't be, and that's flat."

"But I must go to him!" said she, in so naïve half-wild a fashion, that Mary, comprehending all, looked imploringly at her father, and putting her arm round Grace, forced her into a seat.

"I must go, Sir, and tell him—tell him myself. No one knows what I know about it."

Mark shook his head.

"Could I not write to him? He knows me as well as he knows his own father."

Grace shook her head, and pressed her hand upon her heart, where Tom's belt lay.

"Do you think, Madam, that after having had the dream of this belt, the shape of this belt, and of the money which is in it, branded into my brain for months—years it seems like—by God's fire of shame and suspicion;—and seen him poor, miserable, fretful, unbelieving, for the want of it—O God! I can't tell even your sweet face all.—Do you think that now I have it in my hands, I can part with it, or rest, till it is in his! No, not though I walked barefoot after him to the ends of the earth."

"Let his father have the money, then, and do you take him the belt as a token, if you must—"

"That's it, Mary!" shouted Mark Armsworth, "you always come in with the right hint, girl!" and the two, combining

their forces, at last talked poor Grace over. But upon going out herself she was bent. To ask his forgiveness in her mother's name, was her one fixed idea. He might die, and not know all, not have forgiven all, and go she must.

"But it is a thousand to one against your seeing him. We, even, don't know exactly where he is gone."

Grace shuddered a moment; and then recovered her calmness.

"I did not expect this: but be it so. I shall meet him if God wills; and if not, I can still work—work."

"I think, Mary, you'd better take the young woman up-stairs, and make her sleep here to-night," said Mark, glad of an excuse to get rid of them; which, when he had done, he pulled his chair round in front of the fire, put a foot on each hob, and began rubbing his eyes vigorously.

"Dear me! Dear me! What a lot of good people there are in this old world, to be sure! Ten times better than me, at least—make one ashamed of oneself:—and if one isn't even good enough for this world, how's one to be good enough for heaven?"

And Mary carried Grace up-stairs, and into her own bed-room. "A bed should be made up there for her. It would do her good just to have anything so pretty sleeping in the same room. And then she got Grace supper, and tried to make her talk: but she was distrait, reserved; for a new and sudden dread had seized her, at the sight of that fine house, fine plate, fine friends. These were his acquaintances, then: no wonder that he would not look on such as her. And as she cast her eye round the really luxurious chamber, and (after falteringly asking Mary whether she had any brothers and sisters) guessed that she must be the heiress of all that wealth, she settled in her heart that Tom was to marry Mary; and the intimate tone in which Mary spoke of him to her, and her innumerable inquiries about him, made her more certain that it was a settled thing. Handsome she was not, certainly; but so sweet and good; and that her own beauty (if she was aware that she possessed any) could have any weight with Tom, she would have considered as an insult to his sense; so she made up her mind slowly, but steadily, that thus it was to be; and every fresh proof of Mary's sweetness and goodness was a fresh pang to her, for it showed the more how probable it was that Tom loved her.

Therefore she answered all Mary's questions carefully and honestly, as to a person who had a right to ask; and at last went to her bed, and, worn out in body and mind, was asleep in a moment. She had not remarked the sigh which escaped Mary, as she glanced at that beautiful head, and the long black tresses which streamed down for a moment over the white shoulders ere

they were knotted back for the night, and then at her own poor countenance in the glass opposite.

* * * * * *

It was long past midnight when Grace woke, she knew not how, and looking up, saw a light in the room, and Mary sitting still over a book, her head resting on her hands. She lay quiet and thought she heard a sob. She was sure she heard tears drop on the paper. She stirred, and Mary was at her side in a moment.

"Did you want anything?"

"Only to—to remind you, Ma'am, it is not wise to sit up so late."

"Only that?" said Mary, laughing. "I do that every night, alone with God; and I do not think He will be the farther off for your being here!"

"One thing I had to ask," said Grace. "It would lessen my labour so, if you could give me any hint of where he might be."

"We know, as we told you, as little as you. His letters are to be sent to Constantinople. Some from Aberalva are gone thither already."

"And mine among them!" thought Grace. "It is God's will! . . . Madam, if it would not seem forward on my part—if you could tell him the truth, and what I have for him, and where I am, in case he might wish—wish to see me—when you were writing."

"Of course I will, or my father will," said Mary, who did not like to confess either to herself or to Grace, that it was very improbable that she would ever write again to Tom Thurnall.

And so the two sweet maidens, so near that moment to an explanation, which might have cleared up all, went on each in her ignorance; for so it was to be.

The next morning Grace came down to breakfast, modest, cheerful, charming. Mark made her breakfast with them; gave her endless letters of recommendation; wanted to take her to see old Doctor Thurnall, which she declined, and then sent her to the station in his own carriage, paid her fare first-class to Town, and somehow or other contrived, with Mary's help, that she should find in her bag two ten-pound notes, which she had never seen before. After which he went out to his counting-house, only remarking to Mary—

"Very extraordinary young woman, and very handsome, too. Will make some man a jewel of a wife, if she don't go mad, or die of the hospital fever."

To which Mary fully assented. Little she guessed, and little

did her father, that it was for Grace's sake that Tom had refused her hand.

A few days more, and Grace Harvey also had gone Eastward Ho.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A RECENT EXPLOSION IN AN ANCIENT CRATER.

It is, perhaps, a pity for the human race in general, that some enterprising company cannot buy up the Moselle (not the wine, but the river), cut it into five-mile lengths, and distribute them over Europe, wherever there is a demand for lovely scenery. For lovely is its proper epithet; it is not grand, not exciting—so much the better; it is scenery to live and die in; scenery to settle in, and study a single landscape, till you know every rock, and walnut-tree, and vine-leaf by heart: not merely to run through in one hasty steam-trip, as you now do, in a long burning day, which makes you not "drunk"—but weary—"with excess of beauty." Besides, there are two or three points so superior to the rest, that having seen them, one cares to see nothing more. That paradise of emerald, purple, and azure, which opens behind Treis; and that strange heap of old-world houses at Berncastle, which have scrambled up to the top of a rock to stare at the steamer, and have never been able to get down again—between them, and after them, one feels like a child who, after a great mouthful of pine-apple jam, is condemned to have poured down its throat an everlasting stream of treacle.

So thought Stangrave on board the steamer, as he smoked his way up the shallows, and wondered which turn of the river would bring him to his destination. When would it all be over? And he never leaped on shore more joyfully than he did at Alf that afternoon, to jump into a carriage, and trundle up the gorge of the Issbach some six lonely weary miles, till he turned at last into the wooded caldron of the Romer-kessel, and saw the little chapel crowning the central knoll, with the white high-roofed houses of Bertrich nestling at its foot.

He drives up to the handsome old Kurhaus, nestling close beneath heather-clad rocks, upon its lawn shaded with huge horse-chestnuts, and set round with dahlias, and geraniums, and delicate tinted German stocks, which fill the air with fragrance; a place made only for young lovers:—certainly not for those black-petticoated worthies, each with that sham of a sham, the

modern tonsure, pared down to a poor florin's breadth among their bushy, well-oiled curls, who sit at little tables, passing the lazy day "à muguetter les bourgeoises" of Sarrebruck and Treves, and sipping the fragrant Josephshofer—perhaps at the good bourgeois' expense.

Past them Stangrave slips angrily; for that "development of humanity" can find no favour in his eyes; being not human at all, but professedly superhuman, and therefore, practically, sometimes inhuman. He hurries into the public room; seizes on the visitor's book.

The names are there, in their own handwriting: but where are they?

Waiters are seized and questioned. The English ladies came back last night, and are gone this afternoon.

"Where are they gone?"

Nobody recollects: not even the man from whom they hired the carriage. But they are not gone far. Their servants and their luggage are still here. Perhaps the Herr Ober-Badmeister, Lieutenant D * * * will know. "Oh, it will not trouble him. An English gentleman? Der Herr Lieutenant will be only too happy;" and in ten minutes der Herr Lieutenant appears, really only too happy; and Stangrave finds himself at once in the company of a soldier and a gentleman. Had their acquaintance been a longer one, he would have recognised likewise the man of taste and of piety.

"I can well appreciate, Sir," says he, in return to Stangrave's anxious inquiries, "your impatience to rejoin your lovely countrywomen, who have been for the last three weeks the wonder and admiration of our little paradise; and whose four days' absence was regarded, believe me, as a public calamity."

"I can well believe it; but they are not countrywomen of mine. The one lady is an Englishwoman; the other—I believe—an Italian."

"And der Herr?"

"An American."

"Ah! A still greater pleasure, Sir. I trust that you will carry back across the Atlantic a good report of a spot all but unknown, I fear, to your compatriots. You will meet one, I think, on the return of the ladies."

"A compatriot?"

"Yes. A gentleman who arrived here this morning, and who seemed, from his conversation with them, to belong to your noble fatherland. He went out driving with them this afternoon, whither I unfortunately know not. Ah! good Saint Nicholas!—For though I am a Lutheran, I must invoke him now—Look out yonder!"

Stangrave looked, and joined in the general laugh of lieutenant, waiters, priests and bourgeoises.

For under the chestnuts strutted, like him in Struwelpeter, as though he were a very king of Ashantee, Sabina's black boy, who had taken to himself a scarlet umbrella, and a great cigar; while after him came, also like them in Struwelpeter, Caspar, bretzel in hand, and Ludwig with his hoop, and all the naughty boys of Bertrich town, hooting and singing in chorus, after the fashion of German children.

The resemblance to the well-known scene in the German child's book was perfect, and as the children shouted,—

> "Ein kohlpechrabenschwarzer Mohr,
> Die Sonne schien ihm ins gehirn,
> Da nahm er seinen Sonnenschirm"—

more than one grown person joined therein.

Stangrave longed to catch hold of the boy, and extract from him all news; but the blackamoor was not quite in respectable company enough at that moment; and Stangrave had to wait till he strutted proudly up to the door, and entered the hall with a bland smile, evidently having taken the hooting as a homage to his personal appearance.

"Ah? Mas' Stangrave? glad see you, Sir! Quite a party of us, now, 'mong dese 'barian heathen foreigners. Mas' Thurnall he come dis mornin'; gone up pickin' bush wid de ladies. He! he! Not seen him dis tree year afore."

"Thurnall!" Stangrave's heart sunk within him. His first impulse was to order a carriage, and return whence he came; but it would look so odd, and, moreover, be so foolish, that he made up his mind to stay and face the worst. So he swallowed a hasty dinner, and then wandered up the narrow valley, with all his suspicions of Thurnall and Marie seething more fiercely than ever in his heart.

Some half-mile up, a path led out of the main road to a wooden bridge across the stream. He followed it, careless whither he went; and in five minutes found himself in the quaintest little woodland cavern he ever had seen.

It was simply a great block of black lava, crowned with brushwood, and supported on walls and pillars of Dutch cheeses, or what should have been Dutch cheeses by all laws of shape and colour, had not his fingers proved to them that they were stone. How they got there, and what they were, puzzled him; for he was no geologist; and finding a bench inside, he sat down and speculated thereon.

There was more than one doorway to the "Cheese Cellar." It stood beneath a jutting knoll, and the path ran right through;

so that, as he sat, he could see up a narrow gorge to his left, roofed in with trees; and down into the main valley on his right, where the Issbach glittered clear and smooth beneath red-berried mountain-ash and yellow leaves.

There he sat, and tried to forget Marie in the tinkling of the streams, and the sighing of the autumn leaves, and the cooing of the sleepy doves; while the ice-bird, as the Germans call the water-ouzel, sat on a rock in the river below, and warbled his low sweet song, and then flitted up the grassy reach to perch and sing again on the next rock above.

And, whether it was that he did forget Marie awhile; or whether he were tired, as he well might have been; or whether he had too rapidly consumed his bottle of red Walporzheimer, forgetful that it alone of German wines combines the delicacy of the Rhine sun with the potency of its Burgundian vinestock, transplanted to the Ahr by Charlemagne;—whether it were any of these causes, or whether it were not, Stangrave fell fast asleep in the Kaise-kellar, and slept till it was dark, at the risk of catching a great cold.

How long he slept, he knew not: but what wakened him he knew full well. Voices of people approaching; and voices which he recognised in a moment.

Sabina? Yes; and Marie too, laughing merrily; and among their shriller tones the voice of Thurnall. He had not heard it for years; but, considering the circumstances under which he had last heard it, there was no fear of his forgetting it again.

They came down the side-glen; and before he could rise, they had turned the sharp corner of the rock, and were in the Kaise-kellar, close to him, almost touching him. He felt the awkwardness of his position. To keep still was, perhaps, to overhear, and that too much. To discover himself was to produce a scene; and he could not trust his temper that the scene would not be an ugly one, and such as women must not witness.

He was relieved to find that they did not stop. They were laughing about the gloom; about being out so late.

"How jealous some one whom I know would be," said Sabina, "if he found you and Tom together in this darksome den!"

"I don't care," said Tom; "I have made up my mind to shoot him out of hand, and marry Marie myself. Sha'n't I now, my"—and they passed on; and down to their carriage, which had been waiting for them in the road below.

What Marie's answer was, or by what name Thurnall was about to address her, Stangrave did not hear: but he had heard quite enough.

He rose quietly after a while, and followed them.

He was a dupe, an ass! The dupe of those bad women, and

of his ancient enemy! It was maddening! Yet, how could Sabina be in fault? She had not known Marie till he himself had introduced her; and he could not believe her capable of such baseness. The crime must lie between the other two. Yet—

However that might be mattered little to him now. He would return, order his carriage once more, and depart, shaking off the dust of his feet against them! "Pah! There were other women in the world; and women, too, who would not demand of him to become a hero."

He reached the Kurhaus, and went in; but not into the public room, for fear of meeting people whom he had no heart to face.

He was in the passage, in the act of settling his account with the waiter, when Thurnall came hastily out, and ran against him.

Stangrave stood by the passage lamp, so that he saw Tom's face at once.

Tom drew back; begged a thousand pardons; and saw Stangrave's face in turn.

The two men looked at each other for a few seconds. Stangrave longed to say, "You intend to shoot me? Then try at once;" but he was ashamed, of course, to make use of words which he had so accidentally overheard.

Tom looked carefully at Stangrave, to divine his temper from his countenance. It was quite angry enough to give Tom excuse for saying to himself—

"The fellow is mad at being caught at last. Very well."

"I think, Sir," said he, quietly enough, "that you and I had better walk outside for a few minutes. Allow me to retract the apology I just made, till we have had some very explicit conversation on other matters."

"Curse his impudence!" thought Stangrave. "Does he actually mean to bully me into marrying her?" and he replied haughtily enough,—

"I am aware of no matters on which I am inclined to be explicit with Mr. Thurnall, or on which Mr. Thurnall has a right to be explicit with me."

"I am, then," quoth Tom, his suspicion increasing in turn. "Do you wish, Sir, to have a scene before this waiter and the whole house, or will you be so kind as to walk outside with me?"

"I must decline, Sir; not being in the habit of holding intercourse with an actress's bully."

Tom did not knock him down: but replied smilingly enough—

"I am far too much in earnest in this matter, Sir, to be

stopped by any coarse expressions. Waiter, you may go. Now, will you fight me to-morrow morning, or will you not?"

"I may fight a gentleman: but not you."

"Well, I shall not call you a coward, because I know that you are none; and I shall not make a row here, for a gentleman's reasons, which you, calling yourself a gentleman, seem to have forgotten. But this I will do; I will follow you till you do fight me, if I have to throw up my own prospects in life for it. I will proclaim you, wherever we meet, for what you are—a mean and base intriguer; I will insult you in Kursaals, and cane you on public places; I will be Frankenstein's man to you day and night, till I have avenged the wrongs of this poor girl, the dust of whose feet you are not worthy to kiss off."

Stangrave was surprised at his tone. It was certainly not that of a conscious villain: but he only replied sneeringly,—

"And pray what may give Mr. Thurnall the right to consider himself the destined avenger of this frail beauty's wrongs?"

"I will tell you that after we have fought; and somewhat more. Meanwhile, that expression, 'frail beauty,' is a fresh offence, for which I should certainly cane you, if she were not in the house."

"Well," drawled Stangrave, feigning an ostentatious yawn, "I believe the wise method of ridding oneself of impertinents is to grant their requests. Have you pistols? I have none."

"I have both duellers and revolvers at your service."

"Ah? I think we'll try the revolvers then," said Stangrave, savage from despair, and disbelief in all human goodness. "After what has passed, five or six shots apiece will be hardly *outré*."

"Hardly, I think," said Tom. "Will you name your second?"

"I know no one. I have not been here two hours; but I suppose they do not matter much."

"Humph! it is as well to have witnesses in case of accident. There are a couple of roystering Burschen in the public room, who, I think would enjoy the office. Both have scars on their faces, so they will be *au fait* at the thing. Shall I have the honour of sending one of them to you?"

"As you will, Sir; my number is 34." And the two fools turned on their respective heels, and walked off.

* * * * * *

At sunrise next morning Tom and his second are standing on the Falkenhohe, at the edge of the vast circular pit, blasted out by some explosion which has torn the slate into mere dust and shivers, now covered with a thin coat of turf.

"Schöne aussicht!" says the Bursch, waving his hand round,

in a tone which is benevolently meant to withdraw Tom's mind from painful considerations.

"Very pretty prospect indeed. You're sure you understand that revolver thoroughly?"

The Bursch mutters to himself something about English nonchalance, and assures Thurnall that he is competently acquainted with the weapon; as indeed he ought to be; for having never seen one before, he has been talking and thinking of nothing else since they left Bertrich.

And why does not Tom care to look at the prospect? Certainly not because he is afraid. He slept as soundly as ever last night; and knows not what fear means. But somehow, the glorious view reminds him of another glorious view, which he saw last summer walking by Grace Harvey's side from Tolchard's farm. And that subject he will sternly put away. He is not sure but what it might unman even him.

The likeness certainly exists; for the rock, being the same in both places, has taken the same general form; and the wanderer in Rhine-Prussia and Nassau might often fancy himself in Devon or Cornwall. True, here there is no sea: and there no Moselkopf raises its huge crater-cone far above the uplands, all golden in the level sun. But that brown Taunus far away, or that brown Hundsruck opposite, with its deep-wooded gorges barred with level gleams of light across black gulfs of shade, might well be Dartmoor, or Carcarrow moor itself, high over Aberalva town, which he will see no more. True, in Cornwall there would be no slag-cliffs of the Falkenley beneath his feet, as black and blasted at this day as when yon orchard meadow was the mouth of hell, and the south-west wind dashed the great flame against the cinder cliff behind, and forged it into walls of time-defying glass. But that might well be Alva stream, that Issbach in its green gulf far below, winding along toward the green gulf of the Moselle—he will look at it no more, lest he see Grace herself come to him across the down, to chide him, with sacred horror, for the dark deed which he has come to do.

And yet he does not wish to kill Stangrave. He would like to "wing him." He must punish him for his conduct to Marie; punish him for last night's insult. It is a necessity, but a disagreeable one; he would be sorry to go to the war with that man's blood upon his hand. He is sorry that he is out of practice.

"A year ago I could have counted on hitting him where I liked. I trust I shall not blunder against his vitals now. However, if I do, he has himself to blame!"

The thought that Stangrave may kill him never crosses his mind. Of course, out of six shots, fired at all distances from

forty paces to fifteen, one may hit him: but as for being killed! . . .

Tom's heart is hardened; melted again and again this summer for a moment, only to freeze again. He all but believes that he bears a charmed life. All the miraculous escapes of his past years, instead of making him believe in a living, guiding, protecting Father, have become to that proud hard heart the excuse for a deliberate, though unconscious, atheism. His fall is surely near.

At last Stangrave and his second appear. Stangrave is haggard, not from fear, but from misery, and rage, and self-condemnation. This is the end of all his fine resolves! Pah! what use in them? What use in being a martyr in this world? All men are liars, and all women too!

Tom and Stangrave stand a little apart from each other, while one of the seconds paced the distance. He steps out away from them, across the crater floor, carrying Tom's revolver in his hand, till he reaches the required point, and turns.

He turns: but not to come back. Without a gesture or an exclamation which could explain his proceedings, he faces about once more, and rushes up the slope as hard as legs and wind permitted.

Tom is confounded with astonishment: either the Bursch is seized with terror at the whole business, or he covets the much-admired revolver; in either case, he is making off with it before the owner's eyes.

"Stop! Hillo! Stop thief! He's got my pistol!" and away goes Thurnall in chase after the Bursch, who, never looking behind, never sees that he is followed: while Stangrave and the second Bursch look on with wide eyes.

Now the Bursch is a "gymnast," and a capital runner; and so is Tom likewise; and brilliant is the race upon the Falkenhohe. But the victory, after a while, becomes altogether a question of wind; for it was all up-hill. The crater, being one of "explosion, and not of elevation," as the geologists would say, does not slope downward again, save on one side, from its outer lip; and Tom and the Bursch were breasting a fair hill, after they had emerged from the "kessel" below.

Now, the Bursch had had too much Thronerhofberger the night before; and possibly, as Burschen will in their vacations, the night before that also; whereby his diaphragm surrendered at discretion, while his heels were yet unconquered; and he suddenly felt a strong gripe, and a stronger kick, which rolled him over on the turf.

The hapless youth, who fancied himself alone upon the mountain tops, roared mere incoherences; and Tom, too angry to

listen, and too hurried to punish, tore the revolver out of his grasp; whereon one barrel exploded—

"I have done it now!"

No: the ball had luckily buried itself in the ground.

Tom turned, to rush down hill again, and meet the impatient Stangrave.

Crack—whing—g—g!

"A bullet!"

Yes! And, prodigy on prodigy, up the hill towards him charged, as he would upon a whole army, a Prussian gendarme, with bayonet fixed.

Tom sat down upon the mountain-side, and burst into inextinguishable laughter, while the gendarme came charging up, right toward his very nose.

But up to his nose he charged not; for his wind was short, and the noise of his roaring went before him. Moreover, he knew that Tom had a revolver, and was a "mad Englishman."

Now, he was not afraid of Tom, or of a whole army: but he was a man of drills and of orders, of rules and of precedents, as a Prussian gendarme ought to be; and for the modes of attacking infantry, cavalry, and artillery, man, woman, and child, thief and poacher, stray pig, or even stray wolf, he had drill and orders sufficient: but for attacking a Colt's revolver, none.

Moreover, for arresting all manner of riotous Burschen, drunken boors, French red Republicans, Mazzini-hatted Italian refugees, suspect Polish incendiaries, or other feras naturæ, he had precedent and regulation: but for arresting a mad Englishman, none. He held fully the opinion of his superiors, that there was no saying what an Englishman might not, could not, and would not do. He was a sphinx, a chimera, a lunatic broke loose, who took unintelligible delight in getting wet, and dirty, and tired, and starved, and all but killed; and called the same "taking exercise:"—who would see everything that nobody ever cared to see, and who knew mysteriously everything about everywhere; whose deeds were like his opinions, utterly subversive of all constituted order in heaven and earth; being, probably, the inhabitant of another planet; possibly the man in the moon himself, who had been turned out, having made his native satellite too hot to hold him. All that was to be done with him was to inquire whether his passport was correct, and then (with a due regard to self-preservation) to endure his vagaries in pitying wonder.

So the gendarme paused panting; and not daring to approach, walked slowly and solemnly round Tom, keeping the point of his bayonet carefully towards him, and roaring at intervals—

"You have murdered the young man!"

"But I have not!" said Tom. "Look and see."

"But I saw him fall!"

"But he has got up again, and run away."

"So! Then where is your passport?"

That one other fact, cognizable by the mind of a Prussian gendarme, remained as an anchor for his brains under the new and trying circumstances, and he used it. "Here!" quoth Tom, pulling it out.

The gendarme stepped cautiously forward.

"Don't be frightened. "I'll stick it on your bayonet-point;" and suiting the action to the word, Tom caught the bayonet-point, put the passport on it, and pulled out his cigar-case.

"Mad Englishman!" murmured the gendarme. "So! The passport is correct. But der Herr must consider himself under arrest. Der Herr will give up his death-instrument."

"By all means," says Tom: and gives up the revolver.

The gendarme takes it very cautiously; meditates awhile how to carry it; sticks the point of his bayonet into its muzzle, and lifts it aloft.

"Schon! Das kriegt! Has der Herr any more death-instruments?"

"Dozens!" says Tom, and begins fumbling in his pockets; from whence he pulls a case of surgical instruments, another of mathematical ones, another of lancets, and a knife with innumerable blades, saws, and pickers, every one of which he opens carefully, and then spreads the whole fearful array upon the grass before him.

The gendarme scratches his head over those too plain proofs of some tremendous conspiracy.

"So! Man must have a dozen hands! He is surely Palmerston himself; or at least Hecker, or Mazzini!" murmurs he, as he meditates how to stow them all.

He thinks now that the revolver may be safe elsewhere; and that the knife will do best on the bayonet-point. So he unships the revolver.

Bang goes barrel number two, and the ball goes into the turf between his feet.

"You will shoot yourself soon, at that rate," says Tom.

"So? Der Herr speaks German like a native," says the gendarme, growing complimentary in his perplexity. "Perhaps der Herr would be so good as to carry his death-instruments himself, and attend on the Herr Polizeirath, who is waiting to see him."

"By all means!" And Tom picks up his tackle, while the

prudent gendarme reloads; and Tom marches down the hill, the gendarme following, with his bayonet disagreeably near the small of Tom's back.

"Don't stumble! Look out for the stones, or you'll have that skewer through me!"

"So! Der Herr speaks German like a native," says the gendarme, civilly. "It is certainly der Palmerston," thinks he, "his manners are so polite."

Once at the crater edge, and able to see into the pit, the mystery is, in part at least, explained: for there stand not only Stangrave and Bursch number two, but a second gendarme, two elderly gentlemen, two ladies, and a black boy.

One is Lieutenant D * * *, by his white moustache. He is lecturing the Bursch, who looks sufficiently foolish. The other is a portly and awful-looking personage in uniform, evidently the Polizeirath of those parts, armed with the just terrors of the law: but Justice has, if not her eyes bandaged, at least her hands tied; for on his arm hangs Sabina, smiling, chatting, entreating. The Polizeirath smiles, bows, ogles, evidently a willing captive. Venus had disarmed Rhadamanthus, as she has Mars so often; and the sword of justice must rust in its scabbard.

Some distance behind them is Stangrave, talking in a low voice, earnestly, passionately,—to whom but to Marie?

And lastly, opposite each other, and like two dogs who are uncertain whether to make friends or fight, are a gendarme and Sabina's black boy: the gendarme, with shouldered musket, is trying to look as stiff and cross as possible, being scandalised by his superior officer's defection from the path of duty; and still more by the irreverence of the black boy, who is dancing, grinning, snapping his fingers, in delight at having discovered and prevented the coming tragedy.

Tom descends, bowing courteously, apologises for having been absent when the highly distinguished gentleman arrived; and turning to the Bursch, begs him to transmit to his friend who has run away his apologies for the absurd mistake which led him to, &c. &c.

The Polizeirath looks at him with much the same blank astonishment as the gendarme had done; and at last ends by lifting up his hands, and bursting into an enormous German laugh; and no one on earth can laugh as a German can, so genially and lovingly, and with such intense self-enjoyment.

"Oh, you English! you English! You are all mad, I think! Nothing can shame you, and nothing can frighten you! Potz! I believe when your Guards at Alma walked into that battery, the other day every one of them was whistling your Jim Crow.

even after he was shot dead!" And the jolly Polizeirath laughed at his own joke, till the mountain rang. "But you must leave the country, Sir; indeed you must. We cannot permit such conduct here—I am very sorry."

"I entreat you not to apologise, Sir. In any case, I was going to Alf by eight o'clock, to meet the steamer for Treves. I am on my way to the war in the East, viâ Marseilles. If you would, therefore, be so kind as to allow the gendarme to return me that second revolver, which also belongs to me—"

"Give him his pistol!" shouted the magistrate. "Potz! Let us be rid of him at any cost, and live in peace, like honest Germans. Ah, poor Queen Victoria! What a lot! To have the government of five-and-twenty million such!"

"Not five-and-twenty millions," says Sabina. "That would include the ladies; and we are not mad too, surely, your Excellency?"

The Polizeirath likes to be called your Excellency, of course, or any other mighty title which does or does not belong to him; and that Sabina knows full well.

"Ah, my dear madam, how do I know that? The English ladies do every day here what no other dames would dare or dream—what then, must you be at home? Ach! your poor husbands!"

"Mr. Thurnall!" calls Marie, from behind. "Mr. Thurnall!"

Tom comes, with a quaint, dogged smile on his face.

"You see him, Mr. Stangrave! You see the man who risked for me liberty, life,—who rescued me from slavery, shame, suicide,—who was to me a brother, a father, for years!—without whose disinterested heroism you would never have set eyes on the face which you pretend to love. And you repay him by suspicion—insult—Apologise to him, Sir! Ask his pardon now, here, utterly, humbly: or never speak to Marie Lavington again!"

Tom looked first at her, and then at Stangrave. Marie was convulsed with excitement; her thin cheeks were crimson, her eyes flashed very flame. Stangrave was pale—calm outwardly, but evidently not within. He was looking on the ground, in thought so intense that he hardly seemed to hear Marie. Poor fellow! he had heard enough in the last ten minutes to bewilder any brain.

At last he seemed to have strung himself for an effort, and spoke, without looking up.

"Mr. Thurnall!"

"Sir?"

"I have done you a great wrong!"

"We will say no more about it, Sir. It was a mistake, and

I do not wish to complicate the question. My true ground of quarrel with you is your conduct to Miss Lavington. She seems to have told you her true name, so I shall call her by it."

"What I have done, I have undone!" said Stangrave, looking up. "If I have wronged her, I have offered to right her; if I have left her, I have sought her again; and if I left her when I knew nothing, now that I know all, I ask her here, before you, to become my wife!"

Tom looked inquiringly at Marie.

"Yes; I have told him all—all!" and she hid her face in her hands.

"Well," said Tom, "Mr. Stangrave is a very enviable person; and the match, in a worldly point of view, is a most fortunate one for Miss Lavington; and that stupid rascal of a gendarme has broken my revolver."

"But I have not accepted him," cried Marie; "and I will not, unless you give me leave."

Tom saw Stangrave's brow lower, and pardonably enough, at this.

"My dear Miss Lavington, as I have never been able to settle my own love affairs satisfactorily to myself, I do not feel at all competent to settle other people's. Good-bye! I shall be late for the steamer." And, bowing to Stangrave and Marie, he turned to go.

"Sabina! Stop him!" cried she; "he is going, without even a kind word!"

"Sabina," whispered Tom as he passed her,—"a bad business—selfish coxcomb; when her beauty goes, won't stand her temper and her flightiness: but I know you and Claude will take care of the poor thing, if anything happens to me."

"You're wrong—prejudiced—indeed!"

"Tut, tut, tut!—Good-bye, you sweet little sunbeam. Good morning, gentlemen!"

And Tom hurried up the slope and out of sight, while Marie burst into an agony of weeping.

"Gone, without a kind word!"

Stangrave bit his lip, not in anger, but in manly self-reproach.

"It is my fault, Marie! my fault! He knew me too well of old, and had too much reason to despise me! But he shall have reason no longer. He will come back, and find me worthy of you; and all will be forgotten. Again I say it, I accept your quest, for life and death. So help me God above, as I will not fail or falter, till I have won justice for you and for your race! Marie?"

He conquered: how could he but conquer? for he was man.

and she was woman; and he looked more noble in her eyes, while he was confessing his past weakness, than he had ever done in his proud assertion of strength.

But she spoke no word in answer. She let him take her hand, pass her arm through his, and lead her away, as one who had a right.

They walked down the hill behind the rest of the party, blest, but silent and pensive; he with the weight of the future, she with that of the past.

"It is very wonderful," she said at last. "Wonderful . . that you can care for me. . . . Oh, if I had known how noble you were, I should have told you all at once."

"Perhaps I should have been as ignoble as ever," said Stangrave, "if that young English Viscount had not put me on my mettle by his own nobleness."

"No! no! Do not belie yourself. You know what he does not;—what I would have died sooner than tell him."

Stangrave drew the arm closer through his, and clasped the hand. Marie did not withdraw it.

"Wonderful, wonderful love!" she said, quite humbly. Her theatric passionateness had passed;—

> "Nothing was left of her,
> Now, but pure womanly."

"That you can love me—me, the slave; me, the scourged; the scarred—Oh Stangrave! it is not much—not much really; —only a little mark or two . . ."

"I will prize them," he answered, smiling through tears, "more than all your loveliness. I will see in them God's commandment to me, written not on tables of stone, but on fair, pure, noble flesh. My Marie! You shall have cause even to rejoice in them!"

"I glory in them now; for, without them, I never should have known all your worth."

* * * * * *

The next day Stangrave, Marie, and Sabina were hurrying home to England! while Tom Thurnall was hurrying to Marseilles, to vanish Eastward Ho.

He has escaped once more: but his heart is hardened still. What will his fall be like?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LAST CHRISTMAS EVE.

And now two years and more are past and gone; and all whose lot it was have come Westward Ho once more, sadder and wiser men to their lives' end; save one or two, that is, from whom not even Solomon's pestle and mortar discipline would pound out the innate folly.

Frank has come home stouter and browner, as well as heartier and wiser, than he went forth. He is Valencia's husband now, and rector, not curate, of Aberalva town; and Valencia makes him a noble rector's wife.

She, too, has had her sad experiences;—of more than absent love; for when the news of Inkerman arrived, she was sitting by Lucia's death-bed; and when the ghastly list came home, and with it the news of Scoutbush "severely wounded by a musket-ball," she had just taken her last look of the fair face, and seen in fancy the fair spirit greeting in the eternal world the soul of him whom she loved unto the death. She had hurried out to Scutari, to nurse her brother; had seen there many a sight—she best knows what she saw. She sent Scoutbush back to the Crimea, to try his chance once more; and then came home to be a mother to those three orphan children, from whom she vowed never to part. So the children went with Frank and her to Aberalva, and Valencia had learnt half a mother's duties, ere she had a baby of her own.

And thus to her, as to all hearts, has the war brought a discipline from heaven.

Frank shrank at first from returning to Aberalva, when Scoutbush offered him the living on old St. Just's death. But Valencia all but commanded him; so he went: and, behold his return was a triumph.

All was understood now, all forgiven, all forgotten, save his conduct in the cholera, by the loving, honest, brave West-country hearts; and when the new-married pair were rung into the town, amid arches and garlands, flags and bonfires, the first man to welcome Frank into his rectory was old Tardrew.

Not a word of repentance or apology ever passed the old bulldog's lips. He was an Englishman, and kept his opinions to himself. But he had had his lesson like the rest, two years ago, in his young daughter's death; and Frank had thenceforth no faster friend than old Tardrew.

Frank is still as High Church as ever; and likes all pomp and

circumstance of worship. Some few whims he has given up, certainly, for fear of giving offence; but he might indulge them once more, if he wished, without a quarrel. For now that the people understand him, he does just what he likes. His congregation is the best in the archdeaconry; one meeting-house is dead, and the other dying. His choir is admirable; for Valencia has had the art of drawing to her all the musical talent of the tuneful West-country folk; and all that he needs, he thinks, to make his parish perfect, is to see Grace Harvey schoolmistress once more.

What can have worked the change? It is difficult to say, unless it be that Frank has found out, from cholera and hospital experiences, that his parishioners are beings of like passions with himself; and found out, too, that his business is to leave the Gospel of damnation to those whose hapless lot it is to earn their bread by pandering to popular superstition; and to employ his independent position, as a free rector, in telling his people the Gospel of salvation—that they have a Father in heaven.

Little Scoutbush comes down often to Aberalva now, and oftener to his Irish estates. He is going to marry the Manchester lady after all, and to settle down; and try to be a good landlord; and use for the benefit of his tenants the sharp experience of human hearts, human sorrows, and human duty, which he gained in the Crimea two years ago.

And Major Campbell?

Look on Cathcart's Hill. A stone is there, which is the only earthly token of that great experience of all experiences which Campbell gained two years ago.

A little silk bag was found, hung round his neck, and lying next his heart. He seemed to have expected his death; for he had put a label on it—

"To be sent to Viscount Scoutbush for Miss St. Just."

Scoutbush sent it home to Valencia, who opened it, blind with tears.

It was a note, written seven years before; but not by her; by Lucia ere her marriage. A simple invitation to dinner in Eaton Square, written for Lady Knockdown, but with a postscript from Lucia, herself: "Do come, and I will promise not to teaze you as I did last night."

That was, perhaps, the only kind or familiar word which he had ever had from his idol; and he had treasured it to the last. Women can love, as this book sets forth: but now and then men can love too, if they be men, as Major Campbell was.

And Trebooze of Trebooze?

Even Trebooze got his new lesson two years ago. Terrified into sobriety, he went into the militia, and soon took delight therein. He worked, for the first time in his life, early and late,

at a work which was suited for him. He soon learnt not to swear and rage, for his men would not stand it; and not to get drunk, for his messmates would not stand it. He got into better society and better health than he ever had had before. With new self-discipline has come new self-respect; and he tells his wife frankly, that if he keeps straight henceforth, he has to thank for it his six months at Aldershott.

And Mary?

When you meet Mary in heaven, you can ask her there.

But Frank's desire, that Grace should become his schoolmistress once more, is not fulfilled.

How she worked at Scutari and at Balaklava, there is no need to tell. Why mark her out from the rest, when all did more than nobly? The lesson which she needed was not that which hospitals could teach; she had learnt that already. It was a deeper and more dreadful lesson still. She had set her heart on finding Tom; on righting him, on righting herself. She had to learn to be content not to find him; not to right him, not to right herself.

And she learnt it. Tearless, uncomplaining, she "trusted in God, and made no haste." She did her work, and read her Bible; and read too, again and again, at stolen moments of rest, a book which some one lent her, and which was to her as the finding of an unknown sister—Longfellow's Evangeline. She was Evangeline; seeking as she sought, perhaps to find as she found—No! merciful God! Not so! yet better so than not at all. And often and often, when a new freight of agony was landed, she looked round from bed to bed, if his face too, might be there. And once, at Balaklava, she knew she saw him: but not on a sick bed.

Standing beneath the window, chatting merrily with a group of officers—It was he! Could she mistake that figure, though the face was turned away?

Her head swam, her pulses beat like church bells, her eyes were ready to burst from their sockets. But—she was assisting at an operation. It was God's will, and she must endure.

When the operation was over, she darted wildly down the stairs without a word.

He was gone.

Without a word she came back to her work, and possessed her soul in patience.

Inquiries, indeed, she made, as she had a right to do; but no one knew the name. She questioned, and caused to be questioned, men from Varna, from Sevastopol, from Kertch, from the Circassian coast; English, French, and Sardinian, Pole and Turk. No one had ever heard the name. She even found at last, and

questioned, one of the officers who had formed that group beneath the window.

"Oh! that man? He was a Pole, Michaelowyzcki, or some such name. At least, so he said; but he suspected the man to be really a Russian spy."

Grace knew that it was Tom: but she went back to her work again, and in due time went home to England.

Home, but not to Aberalva. She presented herself one day at Mark Armsworth's house in Whitbury, and humbly begged him to obtain her a place as servant to old Dr. Thurnall. What her purpose was therein she did not explain; perhaps she hardly knew herself.

Jane, the old servant who had clung to the Doctor through his reverses, was growing old and feeble, and was all the more jealous of an intruder: but Grace disarmed her.

"I do not want to interfere; I will be under your orders. I will be kitchen-maid—maid-of all-work. I want no wages. I have brought home a little money with me; enough to last me for the little while I shall be here."

And, by the help of Mark and Mary, she took up her abode in the old man's house; and ere a month was past she was to him as a daughter.

Perhaps she had told him all. At least, there was some deep and pure confidence between them; and yet one which, so perfect was Grace's humility, did not make old Jane jealous. Grace cooked, swept, washed, went to and fro as Jane bade her; submitted to all her grumblings and tossings; and then came at the old man's bidding to read to him every evening, her hand in his; her voice cheerful, her face full of quiet light. But her hair was becoming streaked with grey. Her face, howsoever gentle, was sharpened, as if with continual pain. No wonder; for she had worn that belt next her heart for now two years and more, till it had almost eaten into the heart above which it lay. It gave her perpetual pain: and yet that pain was a perpetual joy—a perpetual remembrance of him, and of that walk with him from Tolchard's farm.

Mary loved her—wanted to treat her as an equal—to call her sister: but Grace drew back lovingly, but humbly, from all advances; for she had divined Mary's secret with the quick eye of woman; she saw how Mary grew daily paler, thinner, sadder, and knew for whom she mourned. Be it so; Mary had a right to him, and she had none.

* * * * * *

And where was Tom Thurnall all the while?
No man could tell.

Mark inquired; Lord Minchampstead inquired; great personages who had need of him at home and abroad inquired: but all in vain.

A few knew, and told Lord Minchampstead, who told Mark, in confidence, that he had been heard of last in the Circassian mountains, about Christmas, 1854: but since then all was blank. He had vanished into the infinite unknown.

Mark swore that he would come home some day: but two full years were past, and Tom came not.

The old man never seemed to regret him; never mentioned his name after a while.

"Mark," he said once, "remember David. Why weep for the child? I shall go to him, but he will not come to me."

None knew, meanwhile, why the old man needed not to talk of Tom to his friends and neighbours; it was because he and Grace never talked of anything else.

* * * * * *

So they had lived, and so they had waited, till that week before last Christmas-day, when Mellot and Stangrave made their appearance in Whitbury, and became Mark Armsworth's guests.

The week slipped on. Stangrave hunted on alternate days; and on the others went with Claude, who photographed (when there was sun to do it with) Stangrave End, and Whitford Priory, interiors and exteriors; not forgetting the Stangrave monuments in Whitbury church; and sat, too, for many a pleasant hour with the good Doctor, who took to him at once, as all men did. It seemed to give fresh life to the old man to listen to Tom's dearest friend. To him, as to Grace, he could talk openly about the lost son, and live upon the memory of his prowess and his virtues; and ere the week was out, the Doctor, and Grace too, had heard a hundred gallant feats, to tell all which would add another volume to this book.

And Grace stood silently by the old man's chair, and drank all in without a smile, without a sigh, but not without full many a prayer.

* * * * * *

It is the blessed Christmas Eve; the light is failing fast; when down the high street comes the mighty Roman-nosed rat-tail which carries Mark's portly bulk, and by him Stangrave, on a right good horse.

They shog on side by side—not home, but to the Doctor's house. For every hunting evening Mark's groom meets him at the Doctor's door to lead the horses home, while he, before he will take his bath and dress, brings to his blind friend the gossip of the field, and details to him every joke, fence, find, kill, hap and mishap of the last six hours.

The old man, meanwhile, is sitting quietly, with Claude by him, talking—as Claude can talk. They are not speaking of Tom just now: but the eloquent artist's conversation suits well enough the temper of the good old man, yearning after fresh knowledge, even on the brink of the grave: but too feeble now, in body and in mind, to do more than listen. Claude is telling him about the late Photographic Exhibition; and the old man listens with a triumphant smile to wonders which he will never behold with mortal eyes. At last,—

"This is very pleasant—to feel surer and surer, day by day, that one is not needed; that science moves forward swift and sure, under a higher guidance than one's own; that the sacred torch-race never can stand still; that He has taken the lamp out of old and failing hands, only to put it into young and brave ones, who will not falter till they reach the goal."

Then he lies back again, with closed eyes, waiting for more facts from Claude.

"How beautiful!" says Claude—"I must compliment you, Sir—to see the child-like heart thus still beating fresh beneath the honours of the grey head, without envy, without vanity, without ambition, welcoming every new discovery, rejoicing to see the young outstripping them."

"And what credit, Sir, to us? Our knowledge did not belong to us, but to Him who made us, and the universe; and our sons' belonged to Him likewise. If they be wiser than their teachers, it is only because they, like their teachers, have made His testimonies their study. When we rejoice in the progress of science, we rejoice not in ourselves, not in our children, but in God our Instructor."

And all the while, hidden in the gloom behind, stands Grace, her arms folded over her bosom, watching every movement of the old man; and listening, too, to every word. She can understand but little of it: but she loves to hear it, for it reminds her of Tom Thurnall. Above all she loves to hear about the microscope, a mystery inseparable in her thoughts from him who first showed her its wonders.

At last the old man speaks again:—

"Ah! How delighted my boy will be when he returns, to find that so much has been done during his absence."

Claude is silent awhile, startled.

"You are surprised to hear me speak so confidently? Well, I can only speak as I feel. I have had, for some days past, a presentiment—you will think me, doubtless, weak for yielding to it. I am not superstitious."

"Not so," said Claude, "but I cannot deny that such things as presentiments may be possible. However miraculous they

may seem, are they so very much more so than the daily fact of memory? I can as little guess why we can remember the past as why we may not, at times, be able to foresee the future."

"True. You speak, if not like a physician, yet like a metaphysician; so you will not laugh at me, and compel the weak old man and his fancy to take refuge with a girl—who is not weak.—Grace, darling, you think still that he is coming?"

She came forward and leaned over him.

"Yes," she half whispered. "He is coming soon to us: or else we are soon going to him. It may mean that, Sir. Perhaps it is better that it should."

"It matters little, child, if he be near, as near he is. I tell you, Mr. Mellot, this conviction has become so intense during the last week, that—that I believe I should not be thrown off my balance if he entered at this moment . . . I feel him so near me, Sir, that—that I could swear, did I not know how the weak brain imitates expected sounds, that I heard his footstep outside now."

"I heard horses' footsteps," says Claude.—"Ah, there comes Stangrave and our host."

"I heard them: but I heard my boy's likewise," said the old man quietly.

The next minute he seemed to have forgotten the fancy, as the two hunters entered, and Mark began open-mouthed as usual—

"Well, Ned! In good company, eh? That's right. Mortal cold I am! We shall have a white Christmas, I expect. Snow's coming."

"What sport?" asked the Doctor blandly.

"Oh! Nothing new. Bothered about Sidricstone till one. Got away at last with an old fox, and over the downs into the vale. I think Mr. Stangrave liked it?"

"Mr. Stangrave likes the vale better than the vale likes him. I have fallen into two brooks following, Claude; to the delight of all the desperate Englishmen."

"Oh! You rode straight enough, Sir! You must pay for your fun in the vale:—but then you have your fun. But there were a good many falls the last ten minutes: ground heavy, and pace awful; old Rat-tail had enough to do to hold his own. Saw one fellow ride bang into a pollard-window, when there was an open gate close to him—cut his cheek open, and lay; but some one said it was only Smith of Ewebury, so I rode on."

"I hope you English showed more pity to your wounded friends in the Crimea," quoth Stangrave, laughing, "I wanted to stop and pick him up: but Mr. Armsworth would not hear of it."

"Oh, Sir, if it had been a stranger like you, half the field would have been round you in a minute: but Smith don't count —he breaks his neck on purpose three days a week:—by the bye, Doctor, got a good story of him for you. Suspected his keepers last month. Slips out of bed at two in the morning; into his own covers, and blazes away for an hour. Nobody comes. Home to bed, and tries the same thing next night. Not a soul comes near him. Next morning has up keepers, watchers, beaters, the whole posse; and 'Now, you rascals! I've been poaching my own covers two nights running, and you've been all drunk in bed. There are your wages to the last penny; and vanish! I'll be my own keeper henceforth; and never let me see your faces again!'"

The old Doctor laughed cheerily. "Well: but did you kill your fox?"

"All right: but it was a burster,—just what I always tell Mr. Stangrave. Afternoon runs are good runs; pretty sure of an empty fox and a good scent after one o'clock."

"Exactly," answered a fresh voice from behind; "and fox-hunting is an epitome of human life. You chop or lose your first two or three: but keep up your pluck, and you'll run into one before sun-down;—and I seem to have run into a whole earthful!"

All looked round; for all knew that voice.

Yes! There he was, in bodily flesh and blood; thin, sallow, bearded to the eyes, dressed in ragged sailor's clothes: but Tom himself.

Grace uttered a long, low, soft, half-laughing cry, full of the delicious agony of sudden relief; a cry as of a mother when her child is born; and then slipped from the room past the unheeding Tom, who had no eyes but for his father. Straight up to the old man he went, took both his hands, and spoke in the old cheerful voice,—

"Well, my dear old daddy! So you seem to have expected me; and gathered, I suppose, all my friends to bid me welcome. I'm afraid I have made you very anxious: but it was not my fault; and I knew you would be certain I should come at last, eh?"

"My son! my son! Let me feel whether thou be my very son Esau or not!" murmured the old man, finding half-playful expression in the words of Scripture, for feelings beyond his failing powers.

Tom knelt down: and the old man passed his hands in silence over and over the forehead, and face, and beard; while all stood silent.

Mark Armsworth burst out blubbering like a great boy:

"I said so! I always said so! The devil could not kill him, and God wouldn't!"

"You won't go away again, dear boy? I'm getting old—and—and forgetful; and I don't think I could bear it again, you see."

Tom saw that the old man's powers were failing. "Never again, as long as I live, daddy!" said he, and then, looking round,—"I think that we are too many for my father. I will come and shake hands with you all presently."

"No, no," said the Doctor. "You forget that I cannot see you, and so must only listen to you. It will be a delight to hear your voice and theirs;—they all love you."

A few moments of breathless congratulation followed, during which Mark had seized Tom by both his shoulders, and held him admiringly at arm's length.

"Look at him, Mr. Mellott! Mr. Stangrave! Look at him! As they said of Liberty Wilkes, you might rob him, strip him, and hit him over London Bridge: and you find him the next day in the same place, with a laced coat, a sword by his side, and money in his pocket! But how did you come in without our knowing?"

"I waited outside, afraid of what I might hear—for how could I tell?" said he, lowering his voice; "but when I saw you go in, I knew all was right, and followed you; and when I heard my father laugh, I knew that he could bear a little surprise. But, Stangrave, did you say? Ah! this is too delightful, old fellow! How's Marie and the children?"

Stangrave, who was very uncertain as to how Tom would receive him, had been about to make his amende honorable in a fashion graceful, magnificent, and, as he expressed it afterwards laughingly to Thurnall himself, "altogether highfelutin:" but whatsoever chivalrous and courtly words had arranged themselves upon the tip of his tongue, were so utterly upset by Tom's matter-of-fact bonhomie, and by the cool way in which he took for granted the fact of his marriage, that he burst out laughing, and caught both Tom's hands in his——

"It is delightful; and all it needs to make it perfect is to have Marie and the children here."

"How many?" asked Tom.

"Two."

"Is she as beautiful as ever?"

"More so, I think."

"I dare say you're right; you ought to know best, certainly."

"You shall judge for yourself. She is in London at this moment."

"Tom!" says his father, who has been sitting quietly, his

face covered in his handkerchief, listening to all, while holy tears of gratitude steal down his face.

"Sir!"

"You have not spoken to Grace yet!"

"Grace?" cries Tom, in a very different tone from that in which he had yet spoken.

"Grace Harvey, my boy. She was in the room when you came in."

"Grace? Grace? What is she doing here?"

"Nursing him, like an angel as she is!" said Mark.

"She is my daughter now, Tom; and has been these twelve months past."

Tom was silent, as one astonished.

"If she is not, she will be soon," said he quietly, between his clenched teeth. "Gentlemen, if you'll excuse me for five minutes, and see to my father:"—and he walked straight out of the room, closing the door behind him—to find Grace waiting in the passage.

She was trembling from head to foot, stepping to and fro, her hands and face all but convulsed; her left hand over her bosom, clutching at her dress, which seemed to have been just disarranged; her right drawn back, holding something; her lips parted, struggling to speak; her great eyes opened to preter natural wideness, fixed on him with an intensity of eagerness;—was she mad?

At last words bubbled forth: "There! there! There it is!—the belt!—your belt! Take it! take it, I say!"

He stood silent and wondering; she thrust it into his hand.

"Take it! I have carried it for you—worn it next my heart, till it has all but eaten into my heart.—To Varna, and you were not there!—Scutari, Balaklava, and you were not there!—I found it, only a week after!—I told you I should! and you were gone!—Cruel, not to wait! And Mr. Armsworth has the money—every farthing—and the gold:—he has had it these two years!—I would give you the belt myself; and now I have done it, and the snake is unclasped from my heart at last, at last, at last!"

Her arms dropped by her side, and she burst into an agony of tears.

Tom caught her in his arms: but she put him back, and looked up in his face again.

"Promise me!" she said, in a low clear voice; "promise me this one thing only, as you are a gentleman; as you have a man's pity, a man's gratitude, in you"—

"Anything!"

"Promise me that you will never ask, or seek to know, who had that belt."

"I promise: but, Grace!"—

"Then my work is over," said she in a calm collected voice. "Amen. So lettest thou thy servant depart in peace. Good-bye, Mr. Thurnall. I must go and pack up my few things now. You will forgive and forget?"

"Grace!" cried Tom; "stay!" and he girdled her in a grasp of iron. "You and I never part more in this life, perhaps not in all lives to come!"

"Me? I?—let me go! I am not worthy of you!"

"I have heard that once already;—the only folly which ever came out of those sweet lips. No! Grace. I love you, as man can love but once; and you shall not refuse me! You will not have the heart, Grace! You will not dare, Grace! For you have begun the work; and you must finish it."

"Work? What work?"

"I don't know," said Tom. "How should I? I want you to tell me that."

She looked up in his face, puzzled. His old self-confident look seemed strangely past away.

"I will tell *you*," he said, "because I love you. I don't like to show it to them; but I've been frightened, Grace, for the first time in my life."

She paused for an explanation; but she did not struggle to escape from him.

"Frightened; beat; run to earth myself, though I talked so bravely of running others to earth just now. Grace, I've been in prison!"

"In prison? In a Russian prison? Oh, Mr. Thurnall!"

"Aye, Grace, I'd tried everything but that; and I could not stand it. Death was a joke to that. Not to be able to get out!—To rage up and down for hours like a wild beast;—long to fly at one's gaoler and tear his heart out;—beat one's head against the wall in the hope of knocking one's brains out;—anything to get rid of that horrid notion, night and day over one—I can't get out!"

Grace had never seen him so excited.

"But you are safe now," said she soothingly. "Oh, those horrid Russians!"

"But it was not Russians!—If it had been, I could have borne it.—That was all in my bargain,—the fair chance of war: but to be shut up by a mistake!—at the very outset, too—by a boorish villain of a khan, on a drunken suspicion;—a fellow whom I was trying to serve, and who couldn't, or wouldn't, or daren't understand me—Oh, Grace, I was caught in my own trap! I went

out full blown with self-conceit. Never was any one so cunning as I was to be!—Such a game as I was going to play, and make my fortune by it!—And this brute to stop me short—to make a fool of me—to keep me there eighteen months threatening to cut my head off once a quarter, and wouldn't understand me, let me talk with the tongue of the old serpent!"

"He did not stop you: God stopped you!"

"You're right, Grace; I saw that at last! I found out that I had been trying for years which was the stronger, God or I; I found out I had been trying whether I could not do well enough without Him: and there I found that I could not, Grace;—could not! I felt like a child who had marched off from home, fancying it can find its way, and is lost at once. I felt like a lost child in Australia once, for one moment: but not as I felt in that prison; for I had not heard you, Grace, then. I did not know that I had a Father in heaven, who had been looking after me, when I fancied that I was looking after myself;—I don't half believe it now—If I did, I should not have lost my nerve as I have done!—Grace, I dare hardly stir about now, lest some harm should come to me. I fancy at every turn, what if that chimney fell? what if that horse kicked out?—and, Grace, you, and you only, can cure me of my new cowardice. I said in that prison, and all the way home,—If I can but find her!—let me but see her—ask her—let her teach me; and I shall be sure! Let her teach me, and I shall be brave again! Teach me, Grace! and forgive me!"

Grace was looking at him with her great soft eyes opening slowly, like a startled hind's, as if the wonder and delight were too great to be taken in at once. The last words unlocked her lips.

"Forgive you? What? Do you forgive me?"

"You? It is I am the brute; ever to have suspected you. My conscience told me all along I was a brute! And you—have you not proved it to me in this last minute, Grace?—proved to me that I am not worthy to kiss the dust from off your feet?"

Grace lay silent in his arms: but her eyes were fixed upon him; her hands were folded on her bosom; her lips moved as if in prayer.

He put back her long tresses tenderly, and looked into her deep glorious eyes.

"There! I have told you all. Will you forgive my baseness; and take me, and teach me, about this Father in heaven, through poverty and wealth, for better, for worse, as my wife—my wife?"

She leapt up at him suddenly, as if waking from a dream, and wreathed her arms about his neck.

"Oh, Mr. Thurnall! my dear, brave, wise, wonderful Mr. Thurnall! come home again!—home to God!—and home to me! I am not worthy! Too much happiness, too much, too much:—but you will forgive, will you not,—and forget—forget?"

And so the old heart passed away from Thomas Thurnall: and instead of it grew up a heart like his father's; even the heart of a little child.

THE END.

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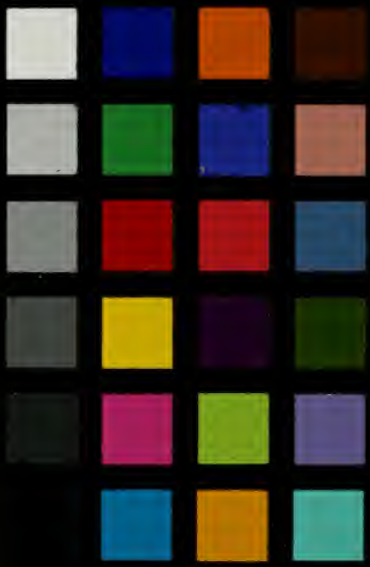
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